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Boris Sokolov

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The Waffen-SS - Hitler's "guard", the "ideological soldiers" of National Socialism - were rightfully considered the elite of the armed forces of the Third Reich, the most combat-ready troops of Nazi Germany. SS men were thrown into the most dangerous sectors of the front, used in decisive directions, in the most difficult situations. The crushing blow of the SS troops more than once decided the outcome of battles and entire campaigns. The names of the SS divisions — "Dead Head", "Reich", "SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler", "Viking", etc. — were known to every soldier on both sides of the front. Nazi propaganda cultivated the myth of their invincibility.

In his new book, the well-known historian analyzes the main battles and operations of the Great Patriotic War, in which SS divisions and corps played a decisive role — the battles for Kharkov in February-March 1943, the Battle of Kursk, the liquidation of the Soviet bridgehead on the Mius River in July— August 1943, Korsun-Shevchenko operation, deblockade of the German 1st Panzer Army in April 1944, counterattacks in the area of Lake Balaton in January and March 1945.

Examining in detail the course of battles and the style of warfare, as well as the strategic opportunities that were not realized by both sides, the author shows how, despite the high combat effectiveness of the elite SS units and the decisive importance that Hitler attached to operations with their participation, they were not in able to reverse the unfavorable course of the war for Germany and were eventually defeated by the Red Army.

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SS TROOPS - "IDEOLOGICAL SOLDIERS" OR SELECTED GUARDS?

At various times, there were 28 SS divisions on the Eastern Front, but 12 of them took part in the battles only in the last months of the war. Among those that were most active, of the seven tank ones, the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, Reich, Totenkopf (Dead Head), Viking, Hitler Youth can be mentioned; of the six motorized (panzer-grenadier) - Police, "Nordland", "Reichsführer SS", "Horst Wessel". On the Eastern Front

Croatian, Latvian, Estonian, Hungarian and other national SS divisions also operated, as well as the Bulgarian SS brigade, which fought in the last weeks of the war in Austria.

The SS troops at the first stage of their development were considered as the elite troops of the Reich, distinguished by racial purity and unconditional devotion to the ideas of National Socialism. In the same way as the elite troops and carriers of the misanthropic Nazi ideas, they were looked at on the Soviet side. The arrival of SS divisions on a given sector of the front was usually considered by the Soviet command as preparation for an early offensive, and if this happened during the Soviet offensive, then as a sign of an imminent counterattack and the intention of stubborn resistance on this sector of the front, especially stubbornly to hold this territory. Compared to the divisions of the Wehrmacht, the SS divisions suffered significantly greater losses, according to

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how many were used in the most dangerous places and for the most important operations.

The German formations of the SS troops, consisting of Germans and representatives of the so-called "Germanic peoples" - the Dutch, Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Finns, were indeed distinguished by good training and increased combat capability. In terms of the intensity and duration of their combat training, the fighters of these divisions surpassed the majority of soldiers and officers of the Wehrmacht, with the exception of the elite division "Grossdeutschland" ("Grossdeutschland").

Since 1943, the active formation of SS divisions from the so-called "non-German peoples" began, which, after the defeat at Stalingrad, were almost all recognized as Aryan. Of the non-German formations of the SS troops, two Latvian (15th and 19th) and one Estonian (20th) divisions of the SS troops approached the German divisions in terms of their qualities, as well as the motorized brigade "Wallonia", subsequently deployed to the 28th SS Volunteer Grenadier Division. All the troops of these formations were ideologically motivated to fight, which increased their combat capability. The Walloons who fought in the SS troops, in their majority, joined the nationalist organization Action Français and the pro-fascist organization Rex. The Latvians and Estonians who served in the SS troops believed that by their struggle they brought closer the restoration of the independence of their countries, although Hitler did not give them any political promises in this regard. Therefore, the Estonian and Latvian SS divisions retained high combat capability, at least as long as the fighting took place on the territory of their countries or on the adjacent Soviet territory. Other non-German volunteer units of the SS troops, formed mainly in 1944-1945, when the defeat of Germany was already obvious, on the contrary, did not differ in high combat effectiveness and were significantly inferior in this respect not only to the German divisions of the SS troops, but also to the divisions of the Wehrmacht. Non-German formations of the SS troops, formed from Belarusians, Russians, Ukrainians, French, Italians, Croats,

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Albanians, Bosnians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Romanians and some other peoples, as well as Volksdeutsche, who lived on the territory of the respective countries, for the most part took only a very limited part in the hostilities, and many divisions never completed their formation and did not enter into the battle. Most of the fighters of these divisions were driven by the desire to leave together with the German troops from the advancing Red Army and Allied troops, since they did not expect anything good from the victors. For example, the 14th Ukrainian Grenadier Division of the SS troops "Galicia", formed in October 1943, first appeared on the Soviet-German front in July 1944. Even during the formation of the division, the Germans were alarmed by the large influx of volunteers - more than 50 thousand people instead of the required 15 thousand. The German command seemed suspicious that so many Western Ukrainians were burning with the desire to shed blood for the Führer and Great Germany. Once at the front, the 14th Grenadier Division immediately fell into the Brodsky "boiler". More than 200,000 escaped from the "cauldron". man along with

the division commander, Brigadeführer Fritz Freytag (a significant part of those who broke through were German soldiers of the division). The remaining fighters of the 14th Grenadier Division of the SS troops (and in total by the beginning of the battle there were 15.3 thousand people in the division) either died in battle, or in their majority joined the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in the Carpathians, which they collected - Fox to do from the very beginning, entering the SS division. After that, the 14th SS division was replenished from among the Ukrainians, who retreated along with the German troops. For the second and last time, the 14th SS Grenadier Division went into battle | April 1945 in Austria and for about a month she resisted the Soviet troops, until she broke away from them in early May, after which she successfully surrendered to the Anglo-American troops.

In the Red Army, nothing like the SS troops existed in principle. Sometimes they are mistakenly likened to the troops of the NKVD. Operational formations of the NKVD (brigades and divisions) really fought at the front in 1941—

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1943 (in particular, in March 1943, the NKVD brigade defended Kharkov, which was attacked by the SS tank corps). However, these troops were not elite either in terms of their level of training, in no way differing in this respect from other formations of the Red Army, nor in terms of the level of their weapons. Characteristically, there were no tank divisions and brigades in the NKVD troops at all. They were intended mainly for anti-partisan struggle. In particular, the NKVD troops took an active part in the deportation of the "punished peoples" in 1944-1945. Only the lack of forces in 1941-1942, when entire armies and fronts were taken prisoner, forced the NKVD troops to be sent to the front, where they did not differ in any way, at least for the better, from the divisions of the Red Army. The effect was that they were trained in combat in front-line conditions even worse than ordinary divisions of the Red Army.

In principle, the Soviet Guards divisions could claim the role of elite formations. However, in practice, the assignment of the rank of Guards meant only a slight increase in the soldier's rations and reinforcements in the division. The soldiers of the guards divisions did not receive any additional combat training, and large irretrievable losses led to the fact that the proportion of experienced veterans in the guards divisions was as small as in ordinary army divisions and brigades. And in terms of combat readiness, the guards units and formations did not differ much from ordinary divisions and brigades.

Closest to the concept of "elite troops" in the Red Army were airborne formations. Their fighters really received longer training compared to ordinary infantrymen, since the paratrooper still needed to be taught how to jump with a parachute and fight as part of the units after landing. True, Soviet airborne troops were rarely used for their intended purpose and, as a rule, unsuccessfully. The most famous operation was the landing of three airborne brigades to capture bridgeheads across the Dnieper in September 1943. As a result of poor training, letchi

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kov military transport aviation and due to poor reconnaissance of the landing areas, most of the paratroopers ended up either in the Dnieper or directly on the German positions and did not complete their tasks. Most often, airborne formations were used as simple infantry. In particular, there were many paratroopers in the 5th Guards Army of General A.S. Zhadov, who fought against the SS Panzer Corps on the Kursk Bulge, and in the 9th Guards Army of General V.I. Glagolev, who fought against the SS divisions in Hungary in 1945. However, these armies did not consist only of airborne formations, and the guards airborne divisions did not show any special combat capability and stamina compared to simple rifle divisions. After all, a significant part of what the paratroopers were taught could not find application in ordinary combat.

Sometimes Soviet generals and marshals even imagined the appearance of separate SS divisions on their sectors of the front, although in reality at that moment the divisions mentioned in their reports were in a completely different place. As a rule, such postscripts were made to justify their own failures, since the divisions of the SS troops had great authority in the Red Army even when there was nothing of them on the Soviet-German front. For example, the command of the 51st Separate Army, which unsuccessfully defended the Crimea in the fall of the 41st, claimed that the SS division "Viking" and "SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" acted against them. As the former deputy commander of the 51st Army, General P.I. Batov, stated in his memoirs, the 11th Army of E. von Manstein at the time of the breakthrough through Perekop had the motorized SS divisions "Adolf Hitler" and "Viking". Here it should be noted that, firstly, at that moment the Leibstandarte, in terms of its staff, was more likely to correspond to a brigade, and not a division, and secondly, during the invasion of the 11th Army into the Crimea, he, together with the Viking, crossed the Dnieper in the lower course, which the Soviet command, including the Headquarters, should already have known about by that time. Nevertheless, Batov insisted in his memoirs: "The corporal, taken prisoner by Major L. M. Kudidze in the Vasilyevka area,

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showed that he served in the SS Viking division, transferred from near Kyiv to the Crimean direction. Disinformation from the German side in this case could have taken place. It made sense for Manstein to exaggerate his forces, especially where he did not strike the main blow. But there could have been deliberate misinformation by the Soviet commanders of the enemy forces opposing them in order to achieve the sending of additional reserves. Moreover, in this case, disinformation could not even come from Batov or the commander of the 51st Army, General F.I. Kuznetsov, but, say, from the commander of the division defending in the Vasilyevka area. The Soviet commanders, who were defending in the Crimea, then constantly reported that there were dozens of German tanks against them. In fact, at that moment, the 11th Army had no tanks at all. There were none (at that time, by the way, they were also part of the Viking and the Leibstandarte, but Soviet intelligence did not yet know about this and believed that German motorized formations were equipped with tanks. It cannot be ruled out that Soviet intelligence was honestly mistaken. Captured corporal could have been a vacationer or a wounded man who had recovered, returning to his unit and knowing only that she had been transferred to the approaches to the Crimea, but had no idea that she had already gone beyond the Dnieper. Our intelligence decided that the Viking was here , on Perekop.

Batov wrote in his memoirs: "Near the village of Chervonogrey, not far from the Chervoniy Shepherd state farm, the department of junior sergeant Krasikov dug trenches for his company. The attention of the fighters was attracted by a single passenger car, which was walking behind our company. Yes, they are Germans! Krasikov gave the command to open fire on the slopes of the car. Soon there were four prisoners in front of him; one of them turned out to be an intelligence officer of the 42nd army corps of the 11th army of Manstein, he had a topographic map with the situation on it. She said that in the first echelon, the 22nd, 46th, 73rd, 50th infantry divisions, reinforced with tanks, were moving towards the Crimea. Thus, we had a clear idea of the operational situation, the grouping of enemy forces that had taken shape at the beginning

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September: the spearhead of the 11th German Army was heading for the Crimea (Anena Melitopol, where our 9th Army was withdrawing), and specifically for Perekop. However, the fact of the matter is that there were no tanks! There was not even a Viking with a Leibstandarte, in which Soviet intelligence could even suspect the presence of tanks. Most likely, Batov came up with tanks back then, in September of the 41st, in the 60s, when he was working on his memoirs.

Similarly, during the defensive battle near Kursk in July 1943, the command of the Voronezh Front claimed that, among others, the Viking SS Panzer Division was operating against it. In fact, this division was part of the 24th Panzer Corps, which was in the reserve of the OKH (High Command of the Ground Forces). This body was

entered into battle only after the completion of the Citadel, and not against the Voronezh Front, but to localize the breakthrough of the South-Western Front on the Donets River.

In addition, Soviet historians and memoirists were very fond of "for solidity" to rank the division "Grossdeutschland" among the SS troops, although this truly elite division remained safely part of the Wehrmacht, and not the SS troops, throughout the war.

In this book, I will not talk about the combat path of each SS division on the Eastern Front. This would require the creation of a multi-volume work. I want to analyze only a few of the most important, strategically important operations in which the SS troops were used as corps, and in the final stage of the war as a tank army. Interestingly, massively, as part of the corps and the army, the SS troops were used almost exclusively on the southern wing of the Eastern Front. This was explained by the importance that Hitler attached to holding the Donbass and Ukraine in 1943-1944 and the oil fields and refineries of Hungary in 1945.

Our book will deal with the battle for Kharkov in February-March 1943, the Battle of Kursk in July-August 1943, the breakthrough from the encirclement of the German 1st tank army in March-April 1944 and two battles in the lake area. Balaton in Hungary in January and March 1945. Except

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In addition, the book tells about three tactically interesting battles where the SS troops took part at the divisional level. These are the Korsun-Shevchenkovsky battle in January-February 1944 (in German historiography it is usually called the Cherkasy Cauldron), the battle for Kovel in March 1944, as well as the German counterattack in the Kleschely region (now part of Poland, and then - as part of the Belostok region of Belarus) in July 1944. The appendix contains an article that traces the fate of one imaginary SS man who posed as a Soviet intelligence officer.

BATTLE FOR KHARKIV (February - March 1943)

The SS Panzer Corps, which played a key role in the battle for Kharkov in February-March 1943, began to form [May 3, 1942 in Bergen-Belsen. Initially, it was simply called the SS Panzer Corps, and it was only renamed the P SS Panzer Corps on June 1, 1943. The founder of the SS troops, Obergruppenführer and full general of the SS troops, Paul Hausser, became the first corps commander (on August 1, 1944, he was promoted to Oberst Gruppenführer and Colonel General of the SS troops, thus becoming the eldest of all officers of the SS troops). Shortly after the beginning of the formation of the headquarters of the corps, whose head was Standartenführer Werner Ostendorf, he was transferred to France and became subordinate to the headquarters of the 7th Army, General Friedrich Dollmann. For disguise, the headquarters of the SS Panzer Corps was called the headquarters of the "Commander in Chief of the Reserves in the West." He was to lead all the tank units available in France in case of an invasion in the West. The corps included SS tank (tank-grenadier) divisions Reich, Gotenkopf (Dead Head) and Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, which were reorganized after heavy fighting on the Eastern Front. In reality, the formation of the SS Panzer Corps was completed by the end of 1942. Initially, it was intended to release the 6th Army of Field Marshal Paulus, surrounded in Stalingrad, but it capitulated before

divisions of the corps in late January - mid-February 1943 arrived on the Eastern Front.

The Battle of Kharkov in February-March 1943 is quite well researched and documented both from the Soviet and German sides. The order to redeploy the SS corps to the East came at the very beginning of January. The transfer of SS divisions to Ukraine began on January 9, the very first units arrived in the Kharkov region only on January 22.

The strength of the SS panzer divisions was that each of them had a company of "tigers" that had just appeared at the front. In addition, each division had one tank grenadier battalion equipped with SDK-251 armored personnel carriers (ZAAKYO 251).

Hausser described the arrival of the corps headquarters on the Eastern Front as follows: "The corps commander and chief of staff arrived in mid-January from the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander in East Prussia, first to the headquarters of Army Group Don (commander-in-chief - Field Marshal Erich von Manstein), and then to Headquarters of Army Group B (Commander-in-Chief Field Marshal Baron Maximilian von Weichs) in the Kharkov area. After some time, the divisions were transferred here from France.

The information received on the way to the destination about the situation in Stalingrad was depressing. The news was reported mainly by transport pilots. The situation was hopeless not only for the 6th Army, but also extremely dangerous for the entire army group (February 13, 1943, the headquarters of Army Group Don, renamed Army Group South, also took command over troops of Army Group B, whose headquarters was placed at the disposal of the OKH. - B.S.) ...

After the loss of five German and allied armies, the Red Army gained a huge numerical superiority. This mass just had to win! However, the Soviet command was unable to determine the culmination of its offensive. The superiority of the Germans in command and combat effectiveness of the troops again led, despite the superiority

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the enemy in manpower and equipment, to turn the course of battles in our favor.

At the end of January 1943, Soviet troops reached the following line: Donetsk near Voroshilovgrad - Starobelsk - Valuyki - Upper Oskol and moved west, developing the offensive. From the German troops near Svatovo was the 320th Infantry Division. In Kupyansk, on Oskol, the remnants of the badly battered 298th Infantry Division gathered. To the west, Valuyek was located as a cover for a part of the "Grossdeutschland" division. To the north, the corps of Lieutenant General Hans Kramer gathered the remnants of the German and Hungarian units. There were large gaps between them. All these units were commanded by the German general under the command of the 8th Italian Army Kurt von Tippelskirch, who was subordinate to the headquarters of Army Group B Weichs.

So wrote Hausser in his memoirs. And then, at the end of January, in a report to the headquarters of Army Group "B", he assessed the situation at the front as follows: "The deployment of the Army Group "South Western Front" in the sector located between the Stalingrad-Morozovsk railway and the Kantemirovka line - Starobelsk, with the aim of advancing to the northern bank of the Donetsk. The Italian and Hungarian armies, located to the northwest of the first breakthrough, are threatened from the flank and from the rear by this strike force. In view of such a threat, both armies leave their positions without putting up real resistance. Their retreat turns into a real flight. Army Group "South-Western Front" crosses the Don to the north-west of Stalingrad.

The northern wing of Army Group "Voronezh Front" joins the attack after Army Group "Southern Front" crosses the Lower Donetsk, and Army Group "South-Western Front" crosses Oskol. The southern wing of the Voronezh Front army group joins kataka west.

After the retreat of the Hungarian army, which provided communication to the south, the sector of the front of the German UP and KhSh army corps, which forms a ledge to the east, was taken in pincers from the north-south. After joining the two assault groups

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near Kastornoe, these two German army corps were surrounded. Then the entire army group "Voronezh Front" sets in motion in a westerly direction. The temporary position, hastily established by the command of the German 2nd Army, then turns out to be broken through. During the continuation of the attack to the west, the cities of Kursk, Lgov and Rylsk were taken. After the breakthrough near Kursk, the Voronezh Front Army Group joins the Bryansk Front Army Group for an attack.

The southern wing leaves the Lieven sector during the retreat of the right wing of the German 2nd Panzer Army, the northern wing leaves the sector located northeast of Orel to advance directly on Orel. The operational objective and rhythm of the Russian winter offensive is now clearly visible (see map).

The entry into the line of each army group is carried out in such a way that the German front, inclined along the north-western axis, is gradually covered by the forward attack and, accordingly, defeated.

From Stalingrad to the Oryol Heights, operations continue methodically. The expected successes are achieved at least almost automatically in the case of the 8th Italian and 2nd Hungarian armies. Between Slavyansk and the sector north of Kursk, the German front has been broken through for more than 500 kilometers. The armies of the two Soviet groups are advancing unceasingly to the west.

The Russian command has the second goal of the Dnieper. It does not attach importance to the fatigue of the troops, supply problems and losses incurred during the offensive. It is little concerned by the fact that only the artillery units are keeping up with the movement and that the infantry units are understaffed by civilians, forcibly recruited, and infantrymen without any training. Artillery will be barely used, and the mass effect will temporarily outweigh the factor of untrained and poor equipment of civilian recruits. Due to the five years of wear and tear of the military forces of the Germans and their allies, the Red Army now has a striking superiority. In the course of the further course of operations, the mass

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sa will triumph over a much smaller defender.

The decisive role is played by the fact that the Soviet command does not know the ultimate goal of its offensive. It was reached on the Donets. At long distances, ground supply and the organization of the enemy air army are difficult due to the enormous difficulties of the winter campaign, striking power is weakened after offensive battles that were fought over many hundreds of kilometers.

The superiority of the German command and army can lead to a military advantage, despite the significant numerical superiority of the enemy."

Here Hausser rather objectively characterizes the strengths and weaknesses of the Soviet troops opposing his corps. The main advantages that the SS men had were the excellent training of the fighters and the great experience of the commanders, especially in offensive operations.

Kurt Toppelskirch himself, who also participated in the battle for Kharkov, characterizes the situation in the History of the Second World War as follows: "As a result of the offensive of the Russian troops that began on January 14, a gap 350 km wide was formed in the front of the German and allied armies. The losses of the 2nd German Army were very heavy, and the 2nd Hungarian Army could no longer be counted on. The German army corps, which had been introduced into its zone, withdrew fighting to the Oskol River. The remnants of the Alpine Corps and the 24th Panzer Corps could no longer fight. From the area on both sides of Starobelsk, two German tank divisions and one infantry division with an open northern flank made their way back to Kupyansk, fighting with superior enemy forces, which strongly pressed them frontally, and also constantly threatened to bypass the open flank. . Direct communication with Army Group Don, whose left wing was behind the Seversky Donets in the Lisichansk region, is ready

was torn. These German formations, reinforced in the coming weeks with only a few partially battered and

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on the replenishment of formations, they managed by stubborn resistance, with which they always achieved local success against the advancing Russians, and this time slowed down the offensive so much that by the end of the month the Russian troops reached only the Lisichansk, Svatovo line and further up the Oskol to Tim.

German troops on the front from the confluence of the Seversky Donets with the Don to Voroshilovgrad repulsed the Russian attack, but now a threat hung over their left flank, as the enemy was advancing on Izyum.

In early February, organizational changes took place in the grouping of German troops in the south. The headquarters of Army Group B and the Italian 8th Army were liquidated. Instead of the Italian army, the task force Kempf appeared (later the 8th German army); it included German formations, which until that time were subordinate to the command of the Italian army. Army Group Don was renamed Army Group South and included all formations operating from Rostov to the southern flank of the 2nd Army. The command of the 2nd Army, subordinate to the Army Group Center, was taken by General Weiss. A firm command on the southern sector of the common front was all the more necessary because the detachments, in which such an acute need was experienced, arrived very slowly, and the striking force of the Russian offensive was by no means weakened.

In early February, the Russians crossed the Oskol River and set new tasks for their armies. Further advance to the west was supposed to lead to the capture of Kharkov and prevent the Germans from creating a new powerful defensive line in Ukraine. It was planned that under the cover of this blow, which would be carried out on a wide front and lead to a deep advance to the west, large forces would launch an offensive in a southwestern direction in order to liberate the Donbass and Stalino and destroy the German armies in the area. The Russians almost succeeded in carrying out this dangerous plan.

The blow taken to the west led to a deep pro

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a breakthrough in the front of the extremely weak 2nd Army. On February 9, the Russians reached Belgorod and then advanced 150 km further towards Lebedin. Here it was no longer possible to stop the Russian offensive, but still it was possible to slow it down somewhat, the 2nd Army gradually created a defense on the line that began south of the city of Sumy, then went to the area west of Kursk and adjoined the positions of the 2nd Panzer army. Because of this threat to their northern flank, and because of the lack of forces, the Russians halted their advance in the area of Lebedin. Near Kharkov, the resistance of the German troops lasted a little longer. On February 16, the Kempf task force was forced to leave the city, after its northern flank was outflanked from the direction of Belgorod, the center was pushed back by large forces, and the southern flank was driven back to Merefa as a result of a Russian breakthrough. In the meantime, Kempf's task force had been brought in quite large reinforcements from the west to the area west of Merefa and Krasnograd, so that it could now delay the Russian offensive. On the contrary, between this operational group and the left flank of the 1st Panzer Army, which was located near Izyum, formed from the units of the Fretter-Pico task force, a wide gap was gradually created and there was nothing to close it. Just such a position and sought Russian. They immediately used it to turn south through Lozovaya and Barvenkovo and then move unhindered through Pavlograd almost to Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye, where the headquarters of Army Group South was located. This was the climax of the Russian successes; as it soon turned out, they took on too difficult a task, wanting to achieve two goals at once."

By two goals, Tippleskirch here means that the Soviet High Command sought to simultaneously capture the industrial capital of Ukraine, Kharkov, and reach the Dnieper and seize bridgeheads on its western bank. The German historian general does not seem to consider such a plan a mistake, but, on the contrary, sees in it a certain strategic logic. They say that the attack on Kharkov was supposed to cover the offensive in the southwestern direction.

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nii, to the Dnieper, from flank attacks of the Kharkov grouping. Theoretically, such a plan was good, but only if both groupings of Soviet troops were strong enough to simultaneously and quickly reach the Dnieper and defeat the Kharkov grouping of the enemy. However, in reality, the tank corps moving towards the Dnieper had suffered heavy losses in previous battles and had only a very small number of combat-ready tanks at their disposal. And the troops advancing on Kharkov were unable to defeat the Lanz task force. Initially, it consisted of only two divisions, the motorized "Grossdeutschland" and the 168th Infantry, but the SS Panzer Corps rushed to the rescue. The command of the Voronezh and South-Western Fronts, as well as the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command, planned operations in such a way that the approach of significant enemy reserves was not to be expected. Based on this, two operations were planned in divergent directions. As a result, it turned out that the blow was delivered not with a clenched fist, but with outstretched fingers. The headquarters and command of the Voronezh and Southwestern fronts were in euphoria after the Stalingrad victory and the defeat of the entire southern wing of the German Eastern Front and believed that the defeated enemy units would not recover from the defeat. In the meantime, significant gaps appeared between the advancing Soviet groupings, which Manstein did not fail to take advantage of.

The French historian Georges Bernage described the situation that was epic and bleak for the Germans by the end of January-beginning of February on the southern wing of the Eastern Front: "The front has been torn apart in many places. The Red Army breaks through the gaps, where the remnants of the retreating German divisions are still advancing, and sometimes the latter find themselves in the very rear of the Red Army, like the 320th Infantry Division! The extent is such that there is no longer a real front, but only moving masses of troops, some of which are advancing, while others are retreating! The situation turns into chaos. During this grueling advance

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The Red Army suffers heavy losses, it fills the voids with hastily mobilized civilians, rather "captured" on the move in towns and villages. Their training is superficial, they have no uniform and often only one rifle for five or ten! The survivors will take the rifles of the dead! For Stalin, the life of his soldiers did not have much value. This war had nothing in common with the one that we will recognize a year later in the West, in the summer of 1944. It rather resembles what happened many centuries ago in the great eastern steppes: moving hordes sweep away everything in their path. But now their numbers are much more significant, and the areas where they operate are truly huge. In addition, the bitterness of people and the firmness of the units make this war terrible, wild. Groups of soldiers find themselves left to their own devices in the midst of vast expanses where life support is carried out "if possible", and the "rear" is more an illusion than a reality. The dead mostly remain on the battlefield - there is no time to bury them, and in any case the ground is too cold...

The Soviet invasion seems unstoppable. The nearest targets of the Red Army are the Dnieper and Dnepropetrovsk. On the other side lie the Dniester, Bessarabia and Romania.

Will the Red Army soon be at the gates of the Reich? Then we can expect that Germany will be defeated in the summer of 1943.

The SS Panzer Corps was supposed to stop and reverse the wave of the Soviet offensive. Soviet intelligence was unable to record its transfer from France before the advanced units of the SS divisions entered the battle at Chuguev and Olkhovatka. However, it would not be difficult for the Soviet high command to assume that Hitler still had dozens of divisions in France, including tank divisions, and that after the disaster at Stalingrad, he would certainly transfer some of them to the crumbling after the defeat of the German allied southern wing of the Eastern Front. Moreover, in January and February, and even in March, due to weather conditions, a large-scale landing of the Anglo-American

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Kanian troops in France was in principle impossible. This was well demonstrated by the failure of a local 5,000-strong Canadian landing in Dieppe in March 1942. And the transfer of the 1st and 4th tank armies by Manstein from near Rostov to protect the approaches to the Dnieper was not so difficult to predict. After all, it did not make sense to hold Rostov for a long time in conditions when the Soviet armies were already at the Dnieper. And the divisions freed up as a result of the retreat to the Mius River would have been most logically deployed against the South-Western and Voronezh fronts.

The most reasonable decision on the part of the Soviet High Command would be to throw the main forces of the two Soviet fronts to the Dnieper, at the same time putting up a strong enough barrier against the Kharkov grouping, but not making any attempts to capture Kharkov. After all, if the bridgeheads on the Dnieper were captured by Soviet troops, the Germans would still be forced to leave Kharkov without a fight. And after mastering the crossings across the Dnieper, the defeat of the entire southern wing of the German Eastern Front became a reality, which could significantly bring the end of the war closer. However, the prospect of capturing the second capital of Ukraine attracted the commander of the Voronezh Front, F.I. Golikov, and he convinced the Stavka of the need for an attack on Kharkov in parallel with the thrust to the Dnieper.

The situation could also be saved by the transfer of the troops of the Don Front K.K. Rokossovsky to the southwest. However, the Don Front was renamed the Central Front and thrown into the offensive against Gomel.

Manstein very successfully took advantage of the mistakes of the Soviet command. In Lost Victories, he himself described his plan as follows: "The German front passed in a large arc curved to the east across the North Caucasus and Eastern Ukraine. The right flank of this arc at Novorossiysk rested on the Black Sea. Further, the front of Army Group A (17th Army and 1st Tank Army) passed through the North Caucasus, but in the east it did not have direct contact with the coast of the Caspian Sea.

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The deep open flank of this front facing south was covered from the lower Volga by the 16th MD, located in the Kalmyk steppes east of Elista (Stepnoe) ...

The distance from the line along the Don River, where the 3rd Romanian Army was defeated on November 19 (the area of the Soviet bridgehead on the Donuu Kremenskaya and to the west of it), as well as from the line along the Don River near Kazanskaya, which was defended by the Italians, to the crossing over the Don at Rostov was a little more than 300 km in a straight line. Communications passed through Rostov not only of the entire Army Group A, but also of the 4th Romanian and 4th Panzer armies. The distance from the left flank of Army Group A in the Caucasus to Rostov was at least 600 km, and from the 4th Panzer Army, which was south of Stalingrad, about 400 km.

Further to the west are the communications of the southern. Wings of the German army passed through the crossings across the Dnieper in the cities of Zaporozhye and Dnepropetrovsk. The capacity of the route through the Crimea and the Kerch Strait to the Caucasus was low. The main crossings across the Dnieper in the rear of the southern wing of the German army were almost 700 km away from Stalingrad, and almost 900 km from the left wing of the Caucasian Front. At the same time, the distance to the enemy front

(measured along the lines: the area of Kazanskaya - Zaporozhye and Svoboda - Dnepropetrovsk) was approximately only 420 km ... |

Thus, two factors determined the situation in which the Don Army Group fought and constituted a permanent background against which the events depicted below unfolded.

First, the overwhelming numerical superiority of the enemy. Even after the army group was reinforced by the j -th tank army (from group "A") and the troops transferred to it by the High Command and its composition included 3, and then 4 German armies, the ratio of the number of personnel of the German troops and enemy troops was $1:7$ (this ratio was established taking into account the fact that some Russian

Russian formations were inferior in number to the German divisions).

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Secondly, the strategic threat, which consisted in the fact that the enemy, numerically superior to us, who at times had complete freedom of action during operations due to the defeat of the allied armies, was closer to the vital communication hubs of the southern wing of the German army - to Rostov. and crossings across the Dnieper.

Both of these factors determined the danger that this southern wing would be cut off from its communications, pressed against the coast of the Azov, and then the Black Sea, and destroyed here. The Soviet Black Sea Fleet still had the ability to paralyze our transportation along this sea. With the destruction of Army Groups Don and A, sooner or later the fate of the entire Eastern Front would have been decided.

Needless to say, the picture is quite apocalyptic for the Germans. In the case of correct actions on the part of the Soviet command, we can expect the Soviet armies to reach the Dnieper before the spring thaw, the encirclement and defeat of the entire southern wing of the Eastern Front. But there were also circumstances that gave the Germans a chance to jump out of the traps and turn the course of events in their favor. The Soviet troops, who had been continuously advancing in the south for more than two and a half months, had already suffered significant losses by February 1943. In addition, their supply was hampered by the fact that many roads and bridges in the recently liberated territories were destroyed by the retreating enemy troops.

Taking into account the overall ratio of irretrievable losses on the Eastern Front, which is close to $7:1$, taking into account the losses of the German allies, the same ratio of the number of troops does not look incredible, but only for combat units and taking into account the replenishment introduced by the Soviet side. - ny, including those called directly in part. It was about them that Hausser spoke in his report. These people were thrown into battle untrained, unequipped and almost unarmed (one rifle per ten), and many of them died or were captured in the very first battles. This was one of the most important sources of the colossal underestimation of irretrievable losses in the Red Army. In the database of irretrievable losses of the Ministry of Defense, now

posted

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Noah on the Internet, I have not yet found a single person who would be listed as called directly to the unit. There should have been millions of attacks among the dead ...

The fact that these untrained recruits did not cause much damage to the enemy is also evidence from the Soviet side. Thus, in February 1943, the Voronezh Front directly called up 20,902 people, and in March - 8984 people, having received 20,838 people in these two months as a centralized march replenishment. And this is without the former "surrounders" who were also directly called up. At the same time, some local residents of military age, so that there would be no unpleasant questions about why they were not drafted into the Red

Army in the 41st, they preferred to classify themselves as encircled. I note that the total number of conscripts directly to the unit could be underestimated in the reports of the armies and fronts due to the fact that some of the conscripts were mobilized directly by subunits - companies and battalions, and their number was not reported on command. There was only a little sense from this "black infantry" (it was called so by the civilian coats and quilted jackets that recruits were usually wearing; the Germans called it even more expressively - "ravens") there was only a little bit. Later, in March, when Kharkov had already been abandoned, the command of the 3rd Panzer Army made the following conclusion: "The practice of replenishing army troops at the expense of the local population from the territory liberated from the enemy without preliminary processing of this replenishment did not justify itself. This replenishment that poured into the units, being untrained and undressed, did not strengthen the weakened units, but weakened them even more, becoming a burden for the units that were not able not only to feed and equip them, but sometimes even to arm them. Such recruits were not suitable for replenishing tank units because of their complete unpreparedness. And in the rifle divisions of the 3rd Panzer Army, during the retreat, they also did not find combat use for themselves.

The benefit of this "bastard infantry" could only be when attacking a more or less prepared defense

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enemy. "Crows" undermined minefields, forced the enemy to spend shells, mines, cartridges and air bombs for their destruction. Finally, the continuously attacking "black waves" exhausted the Germans and affected the psyche of the defenders. In defense against untrained conscripts, who had almost no weapons, there was no use. Also, when breaking out of the environment, they were more of a burden. Many of them, under the conditions of encirclement, preferred to go home, so that later, when the Red Army occupied this territory for the second time, they would again be called up in units. Despite the fact that in a number of reports the combat effect of the use of "black infantry" was assessed very low, the practice of conscripting directly to the unit became more and more widespread as more and more new territories were liberated. In the last months of the war, when hostilities were already taking place on the territory of Germany and other European countries, "Eastern workers" of military age released from captivity were called directly to the unit. The huge and completely unjustified losses among those called up directly in the unit of Stalin and his generals and marshals did not bother at all. The only concern for the generals was that the "raven" had to be fed in defense and encirclement, where their combat value was equal to zero. Probably, for the Supreme Commander, the inhabitants of the occupied territories were the first candidates for erasing into camp dust. From this point of view, their death at the front should only be welcomed: after the war, the NKVD will have less work to do.

During the years 1943-1945, the proportion of recruits called up directly to the unit, that is, practically untrained, and often unarmed recruits, steadily increased. This, along with very large irretrievable losses, lowered the quality of the Soviet infantry. The elite SS panzer divisions, on the other hand, retained their high combat effectiveness practically until the very end of the war. It often turned out that selected SS troops fought against poorly trained and armed militia. Nevertheless, Soviet troops were able to defeat the SS, primarily due to their superiority.

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the change in the number of personnel and in the amount of weapons and military equipment.

The fact that the official data on Soviet reinforcements during the battle for Kharkov is significantly underestimated is shown by the following example. During the Voronezh-Kharkov offensive operation, which lasted from January 13 to March 3, 1943, the Voronezh Front, which numbered 347,200 people by the beginning of the operation, irrevocably lost, according to official data, 33,331 people. Sanitary losses amounted to 62,384 people. To the beginning of the Kharkov defensive

operations On March 4, 1943, the grouping of front troops operating in the Kharkov direction totaled 281,800 people. Another grouping of troops of the Voronezh Front, which launched an offensive on March 4 in the Rylsk and Sumy directions, numbered 93,770 people: In total, this gives 375,570 people. It turns out that the statements of Soviet historians and memoirists that by the time the German counter-offensive near Kharkov began, the Soviet troops were experiencing an acute shortage of personnel, to put it mildly, are exaggerated. Indeed, on March 4, the Voronezh Front had 28,370 more fighters in its ranks than on January 13, when it began the Voronezh-Kharkov operation. Meanwhile, in February, he received no less than 30 thousand replenishment people. It is not known whether the front received reinforcements in January after the 13th. Rather, it can be assumed that the units and formations were replenished just before the start of the offensive operation. The March replenishment, most likely, arrived in the troops after March 4th. If these assumptions are correct, then practically the February replenishment could only compensate for the official, probably underestimated irretrievable losses in the Voronezh-Kharkov operation. Even if we assume that by some miracle all the wounded during this operation managed to return to duty by March 4 (which, of course, is absolutely impossible), the troops of the Voronezh Front would have to number about 278.5 thousand people. More realistic is the assumption that by March 4, no more than half of the wounded managed to return to duty. Then the number of front troops by March 4

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should have decreased to 247.3 thousand people, that is, it would have been less by about 97 thousand people than it turned out to be in reality. Thus, from mid-January to early March, the troops of the Voronezh Front received about 100,000 unaccounted for reinforcements (probably part of it came from new formations included in the front). True, the quality of the hastily recruited replenishment, as we have already said, left much to be desired.

Undoubtedly, in January-March 1943, the troops of the Voronezh and South-Western fronts also received a certain amount of weapons and military equipment to compensate for the losses incurred during the offensive. The problem with the tanks was rather that the repair depots of tank formations could not cope with the repair of a large number of tanks and self-propelled guns that were out of order both due to enemy influence and bad roads in conditions of alternating frosts and thaws. .

On January 22, 1943, Hitler decided to withdraw the 1st Panzer Army not to the Kuban bridgehead, but through Rostov. In the future, according to Manstein's plan, it was supposed to be used for a counterattack in Ukraine in order to prevent the Soviet armies from reaching the Dnieper. The 1st Panzer Army became part of the Don Army Group.

Arriving advanced units of the SS divisions immediately entered the battle to prevent the Soviet breakthrough and rescue the encircled divisions. Thus, Hausser ordered the 2nd reinforced company of Hauptsturmführer Hermann Weiser from the reconnaissance battalion of the Leibstandarte to immediately support the 298th Infantry Division, which was surrounded in the area between Kupyansk and Dvurechnaya on Oskol. Before Kupyansk-skaters had to go 70 kilometers on their own. It was not until the evening of January 30 that they joined up with the infantrymen of the 298th division. However, the remnants of the division that emerged from the encirclement had lost their combat effectiveness and needed rest.

The remnants of the 320th Infantry Division were rescued from the encirclement by the 3rd Panzer-Grenadier Battalion of the 2nd Motorized Regiment of the Leibstandarte on the BTR SDK-25]] "Hanomag" led by Sturmbannführer Joachim Peiper. Basic si

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The units of the 320th DIVISION, having broken up into several battle groups, retreated to the west in the direction of Izyum under the onslaught of the 6th Soviet Army. Already on February 4, the right-flank formations of the 6th Army reached the Seversky Donets. The 320th Infantry Division found itself surrounded, although there was no continuous front. The division commander, General Georg Postel, decided to break through to the northwest, to

Kharkov, where he counted on the help of the arriving units of the SS Panzer Corps. The 320th division headed for Andreevka, 60 km northwest of Izyum. On February 7, Andreevka was occupied by the Peiper battle group, which had just been unloaded from the echelons, which was supposed to hold it until the approach of the 320th division. But Piper lasted only two days, and then broke through the encirclement to his own. On February 7, the 320th division was still only in the area of the village of Savintsy, and on February 11 - in the area of Grigorievka. On February 9, Postel was informed that the deblocking group would only be able to speak on February 12. On February 10, Peiper received an order on the 12th to launch an offensive towards Zmiev. The commander of a platoon of three armored personnel carriers armed with 75-mm cannons of the 14th company, SS-Untersturmführer Gurs wrote in his diary: "Orders have been received for Operation Peiper. At night we must cross the river. Donets, break through the main Russian defense line and advance 25 kilometers deep into enemy territory to pull out the "Hearts" division (the 320th Infantry Division was called the Berlin Green Hearts - because of their divisional badge. There about 10 000 men and 1500 wounded Crazy plan, but our panzergrenadiers liked it The battalion was given 7 assault guns My gun moves at the rear of the column Time is 1600 I have everything ready and ready for battle Can I give my diary to Rozin and will he get home? Jacobi reported that his gun needed to return 140 kilometers back to Poltava for repairs. Now I have only one spare gun left. I have not heard anything about the delivery of ammunition. In the evening we should receive explosive charges, hand grenades, etc. .d."

In the combat log of the 2nd SS motorized regiment on February 12, it was recorded: 04.30: Operation Piper began

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lass. We destroyed the enemy in the village of Krasnaya Polyana and cleared the way for the transport convoy. The enemy opened fire on trucks late for the start of the operation, and 6 of them were destroyed. 0640: Peiper's group reached Zmiev without making further contact with the enemy. 0800: Peiper's group is ordered to advance towards Liman and establish contact with the 320th division. 2:00 pm: Contact established. During the night, Peiper's group guarded the gathering place of the 320th division in the Cheremushnaya Zidki Zamostye Butovka area.

In the meantime, by February 12, the 320th division managed to reach the village of Liman, located between Zmiev and Andreevka. In order to connect with it, the SS men had to occupy Zmiev and cross the Mzhai Udai river. Peiper's group, reinforced with two assault guns, was opposed by units of the 7th Guards Cavalry Corps and the 350th Rifle Division. Fortunately for Peiper, there were no Soviet armored units against which his group would have been powerless. In addition to two 75-mm assault guns, Peiper had 6 Stummel self-propelled guns, 6 Grile self-propelled guns, as well as several automatic anti-aircraft guns on a half-track chassis and 60 ambulances. German self-propelled guns had no armor and were powerless in the fight against tanks.

Peiper's group's raid began at 4:30 am on 12 February. After 45 minutes, she reached the Udai River near the town of Krasnaya Polyana. The Soviet guards of the bridge were taken by surprise, and the Germans got the bridge undamaged. One platoon of Peiper's group was left to guard the bridge. An hour later, the group reached the Seversky Donets south of Zmiev, and then captured the city without encountering serious resistance. Leaving his main force at Zmiev, Peiper sent several reconnaissance patrols on motorcycles towards the forward detachments of the 320th division, which, according to the reconnaissance aircraft, were 15 km from Zmiev. At 0800, less than an hour and a half after Zmiev's occupation, Peiper's group was ordered to advance towards Liman, since the 320th division had not yet advanced from there. Piper could not fulfill this order with all his will. The ice on the Donets was already too thin to withstand his technique, the bridge

thirty

in his hands were not, there were no materials and enough sappers (there was only one sapper platoon in the group) to quickly build a bridge. At half an hour in the afternoon the advance detachment, led personally by Postel, linked up with Peiper's scouts. bed and his

the officers were indignant that Peiper did not move towards them. His arguments that the ice was too thin were not believed until the only assault gun of the 320th Division sank while trying to cross. Only some units were still combat-ready. The soldiers suffered severely from hunger and cold. They were also very colorfully dressed: uniforms were combined with warm clothes requisitioned from local residents. The colonnaded division was very stretched, its rear guard was still in the village of Liman. The wounded were carried in carts and sledges. The doctors who came with the battle group worked all night on February 13, providing urgent assistance to the seriously wounded. When Peiper's battalion, along with the encircled, transporting 1,500 wounded in ambulances, moved back to the Udai River, an unpleasant surprise awaited him here. The Soviet ski battalion knocked out the SS platoon guarding the crossing from Krasnaya Polyana and burned the bridge, from which only wooden supports remained. After a fierce battle, motorized riflemen on armored personnel carriers drove the Soviet skiers out of Krasnaya Polyana. The temporary bridge, erected on the site of the Leibstandarte blown up by the hastily arrived sappers, could not withstand the assault guns and armored personnel carriers. Only Postel's foot soldiers and the wounded crossed the bridge. At 0825 hours on February 14, Postel reported that his rear guard had safely crossed the Udai River. SS Untersturmführer Gürs described the events of February 13 in his diary as follows: "The transport for the wounded has arrived. We have to clear the way for him again. In with. Vodyanoye had a hard fight with the Russian ski battalion. By evening we had destroyed them. We cross the river. My gun fired 42 rounds. We have 6 dead. By 19.00 the crossing is over. Characteristically, the German troops, including the SS divisions, fought in battle groups - temporary tactical formations of units and divisions of the division from Wednesday

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reinforcement, the composition of which varied depending on the tasks performed. This made it possible to react quickly to changes in the situation. In the Soviet Army, the tactics of battle groups came only after the Second World War.

After the crossing was completed, Peiper with his armored personnel carriers and assault guns was forced to return to Zmiev. At the Mzha River, he turned west and along its northern bank safely reached Mirgorod, where the Germans had a bridge capable of withstanding armored vehicles. Peiper joined his forces after midnight on February 14 and arrived at Merefá, where Hausser's headquarters were located. For a successful operation to rescue the 320th division, Peiper received a Zo-. Lot German cross.

Peiper himself in a report described the battles to rescue the 320th division as follows: "The 3rd motorized battalion of the 2nd panzer-grenadier regiment of the LAG was tasked to capture Zmiev in order to pick up the remnants of the 320th infantry division and evacuate 1,500 wounded. For this, the battalion received transport and ambulances. Our main line of defense ran along the Uda River with a long wooden bridge across it. On the other side of the river was the village of Krasnaya Polyana, occupied by the enemy. Against our expectations, we arrived at Zmiev without encountering significant resistance. A river (Donets) flowed through Zmiev. There we waited for the approach of Postel's units (commander of the 320th Infantry Division). Soon General Postel appeared with his officers and a large number of transports. First of all, I was asked why we did not cross the river. My answer, that the ice was too thin to support the weight of our vehicles, was not accepted, but at the same moment it was confirmed by the liaison officer. He reported: "Mr. General, the ice can't stand it, an assault gun has just failed."

General Postel was in excellent spirits. He stated that his headquarters would be located here, and we would provide his protection. He was very upset when he learned that our troops were so far away. Then he disappeared somewhere.

After a long pause, the rest of the division approached. We silently sat on our armored personnel carriers, full of unpleasant

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premonitions. Everyone had the same association: Berezina! This must have been exactly what Napoleon's retreat looked like. Many marching, then lightly wounded and, finally, seriously wounded. A whole convoy on sledges and carts. They were overcrowded, some unfortunates were tied to them and lay on their overcoats. Our surgeons and paramedics prepared for immediate assistance. First of all, the wounded were given food, hot drinks and first aid. I remember our battalion surgeon, Dr. Bruestl, who came to see me the next morning. He and his assistant operated all night in the cold and helped many of the wounded. We stood guard, and it seemed to us that this ominous night would never end. The next day (February 13), the endless column moved back. The division and all its wounded moved along the road, and our combat vehicles guarded it from the flanks.

When we finally reached the river, we saw that only smoking piles remained of the bridge. The Russian ski battalion occupied the village, killed and mutilated many German drivers and doctors who had remained in the village since yesterday. Fire was opened on the column from all sides. My battalion occupied the village after heavy fighting for every house, rebuilt the bridge and ferried our rescued comrades across the polda and over the temporarily rebuilt bridge to the other side where they were safe. When the last car reached the opposite shore, the battalion again withdrew to Zmiev and joined our troops after a long raid on the territory occupied by the enemy.

In his report, General Postel argued that the division was quietly advancing through the territory occupied by the enemy, and the situation became critical due to the ever-decreasing mobility, the growing number of those who could not move independently, and the decline in the morale of the soldiers due to the fact that the distance to the German troops does not decrease as they continue to retreat.

In the submission of Joachim ("Jochen") Peiper to the Golden German Cross, it was stated:

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2 - Sokolov

Hitler, under the command of SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper, was thrown into battle immediately after landing at the Kharkov railway station. First, he was ordered to fortify in Andreevka, ahead of the division's right wing, and create a position for the 320th Infantry Division. Peiper complied with the order and on February 7, 1943 was surrounded by large enemy forces (two rifle regiments and a tank brigade). After holding out in Andreevka for 2 days, Peiper led the battalion out of encirclement and withdrew to the main line of defense. Performing the task, he inflicted heavy losses on the enemy and destroyed 2 T-34 tanks. In battle, Piper proved himself to be an experienced and brave commander...

After the defense sector was transferred to the main line Rogan - Lizogubovka - Mirgorod, Peiper was ordered to occupy Zmiev with the forces of his battalion and establish contact with the 320th Infantry Division. Peiper completed the task and led 750 wounded soldiers of this division out of the encirclement. Fulfilling the task, he completely destroyed the ski battalion of the enemy, which prevented his return.

Most of the documents and memoirs mention 1,500 wounded rescued along with the 320th division. It is possible that the submission to Peiper refers only to those wounded who were evacuated by the 60 ambulances that were attached to Peiper's battalion, while approximately the same number of the wounded were evacuated by horse-drawn vehicles of the 320th Infantry divisions.

It is characteristic that the Soviet troops, advancing in February 1943 to Kharkov and the Dnieper, occupied most of the settlements without a fight, did not inflict heavy losses on the enemy, and took almost no prisoners. The German troops, retreating in off-road conditions, suffered heavy losses in heavy weapons and equipment. However, after leaving the encirclement and replenishing

With new equipment and weapons, the German divisions turned out to be combat-ready and could, at least by stubborn defense, ensure the implementation of a counterattack.

In general, on the front of the SS Panzer Corps, the situation is

at

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early February and later remained dangerous. On January 30, Haus heartily reported to the headquarters of the Lanz army group: "The 69th Army and the 3rd Russian Panzer Army have reached Upper Oskol and Valuyek. The 6th Army is pressing hard on Kupyansk and Svatovo, while Popov's army (more precisely, the mobile group of General M. M. Popov. - B. S.) is approaching Slavyansk. The 320th Infantry Division is engaged in a fierce defensive battle near Svatov. The remnants of the 298th Infantry Division, which suffered severe losses in the battles during the retreat, are gathering in Kupyansk.

Parts of the Grossdeutschland Panzergrenadier Division are fighting west of Valuyki, and in the Korochi sector, Kramer's Composite Corps Command Headquarters is gathering badly battered units of German and Hungarian formations arriving from the upper Don. The front has extensive gaps between different parts. The High Command of the Ground Forces (OKH) intends to concentrate the SS Panzer Corps in the Kharkov sector and use it in a concentrated counterattack, which is hampered by the rapid advance of the Soviet troops. It is necessary to prevent their penetration into the collection sector of the hull. The city of Kharkov, as an important road junction, economically and politically valuable, should not be lost. To this end, on January 30, units of the "DR" ("Das Reich") division will be moved to cover the sector to the west of Valuyki (to the northeast of the "LAG")."

The SS corps, destined for the counteroffensive, had to first be involved in defensive battles and, moreover, be brought into battle in parts, which could not but affect its combat capability. Therefore, by the time the counteroffensive planned by Manstein began, his main striking force, the SS Panzer Corps, was significantly weakened. However, even if he could launch a counter-offensive immediately upon arrival from France, as it seems, his forces would still not be enough to solve the ambitious task of encircling and destroying the main forces of the Voronezh and South-Western fronts, rushing to the Dnieper.

Manstein recalled: "On January 29, the headquarters of the army group from

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Taganrog, where he retreated on January 12, moved to Stalino, since now the decisive direction of the army group was no longer on the Don, but on the Donets ...

There was no doubt that the forces of the SS Panzer Corps, which was being concentrated near Kharkov by mid-February, would not be enough to close the gap in the front from Voroshilovgrad to Voronezh. It also could not be used in a timely manner so that it would eliminate the threat on the flank of the southern wing with a counterattack north of the Donets, if the latter remained on the Don and Donets ...

Already on January 20, the intention of two enemy corps to bypass the left flank of the army group - the formation of General Fretter-Pico, stationed near Kamensk - in the direction of Voroshilovgrad, was indicated. The enemy also probed the defense of the remnants of the Italian army, which passed beyond the Don to the east of Voroshilovgrad. In general, the main enemy forces, apparently, sought to move westward in the direction of Starobelsk; Obviously, the enemy wanted first of all to enter the operational space. It could be expected that if this maneuver was successful, the enemy would not be limited to enveloping the Fretter-Pico group, but would advance even further west with large forces and would advance across the Donets in the direction of the crossings across the Dnieper or on the coast of the Sea of Azov. "

What happened at that time on the Soviet side of the front? On January 21, Stavka representative A.M. Vasilevsky and the commander of the Voronezh Front F.I. Golikov, in turn, submitted to Stalin a plan of operation to capture the area of Kharkov and Belgorod, which received the code designation "Star". At midnight on January 23, the plan was approved, and the troops of the front received the corresponding directive. The beginning of the operation on February 1, 1943. The troops of the Voronezh Front were to break through the enemy defenses and advance to a depth of up to 250 kilometers. The task of the Voronezh Front was complicated by the fact that it operated on divergent operational directions, since at the same time its right-flank grouping was advancing on Kursk.

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The 38th, 40th general and 3rd tank armies, the 18th separate rifle corps (soon deployed into the 69th army) and the 6th guards cavalry corps were supposed to capture the Kharkov area. Both armies were reinforced with formations transferred from the 60th Army. The combat composition of the 38th Army, according to the order of the front command of January 28, 1943, included: the 240th, 167th, 206th and 237th rifle divisions of the 38th Army, the 232nd rifle division and the 253rd rifle brigade th army. The 180th, 14th, and 150th tank brigades and three RGK artillery regiments served as reinforcements for the 38th Army.

The 40th Army, advancing on Kharkov through Belgorod, included the 303rd and 100th Rifle Divisions from the 60th Army, as well as the 25th Guards, 183rd, 309,107, 340th and 305th Rifle Divisions, 4, bi 8th ski brigades and 129th rifle brigade. The means of reinforcing the army were the 4th tank corps, the 10th artillery division, the 4th division of the RS and the 5th air defense division. In the second echelon, the 3rd Panzer Army of Lieutenant General P.S. Rybalko was supposed to advance.

It included [2nd Tank Corps of Major General of Tank Troops M.I. Zinkovich, 15th Tank Corps of Major General of Tank Troops V.I. Koptsov, [79th Separate Tank Brigade of Colonel F. N. Rudkin, as well as the 48th Guards Rifle Division of Major General N.M. Makovchuk, the 62nd Guards Rifle Division of Major General G.M. Zaitsev, the 184th Rifle Division of Colonel S.T. Koydy, 160th Infantry Division of Colonel M.P. Seryuginai [11th Infantry Division of Colonel S.P. Khoteev. The 6th Guards Cavalry Corps, Major General S. V. Sokolov, was under operational control of the headquarters of the 3rd Tank Army, which provided the operation from the south. By the beginning of the offensive, the 3rd Panzer Army had 57,557 fighters and commanders, who had 1,353 anti-tank rifles (ATR), 1,223 mortars of various systems, 189 anti-tank, 256 76-mm and [7 152-mm guns, and also 116 122 mm howitzers. Warmia, there were 223 tan

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ka, of which only 85 were combat-ready by the start of the offensive.

The headquarters of the Voronezh Front demanded that the 3rd Panzer Army cut off "the enemy's escape routes to Poltava" and "take the city of Kharkov on the move no later than on the 5th day of the offensive." According to the original plan, the tank and cavalry corps were to enter into action only after the rifle divisions reached the western bank of the Seversky Donets, so that the attack on Kharkov from the south and southwest would be sudden.

However, in the future, it was decided to advance in one echelon. Even before the start of "Zvezda", the 6th Guards Cavalry Corps broke far ahead and reached the line of the Oskol River and the Valuyki station. Soon the 184th Rifle Division caught up with him. Thus, the line was occupied for the start of Operation Zvezda. By January 31, troops of the 3rd Panzer Army were concentrated here. By this time, it had only 50 combat-ready tanks left out of 223. True, during the offensive, the size of the army's tank fleet increased significantly. By February 18, the 3rd Panzer Army had 432 tanks. But of this number, 122 were under repair, and another 214 tanks were knocked out or out of action for technical reasons and were waiting for their turn to be repaired on

battlefields and roads from Rossosh to Kharkov, so that only 96 tanks were combat-ready. The repair base of the army clearly could not keep up with the growing losses of armored vehicles.

For comparison: in the SS Panzer Corps at the time of arrival at the front, there were 317 tanks, including 28 "tigers" and 27 command tanks (mostly from obsolete T-H) intended for control purposes. However, it should be taken into account that in February-March 1943, the SS corps never acted in such a composition, since its divisions arrived on the Eastern Front separately. By the time they finally got together to try to retake Kharkov, their combat strength had been significantly weakened.

On January 31, 1943, the commander of the Don Army Group sent a telegram to the OKH, where he outlined a plan for a counterattack,

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the infantry of which he considered the only means of holding the Donbass. He described its content in his memoirs as follows: "I considered the main prerequisite for this (holding the Donbass. - B.S.) to be a timely strike from Kharkov and the defeat of the enemy northeast of Kharkov even before the thaw began. If this, as, unfortunately, was to be expected, turns out to be impossible, then the Donets Basin, or at least its entire eastern part, will not be able to be retained. Therefore, it would be an operational mistake to try to hold on to the Donets and the lower Don. In addition, we must take into account that our available forces will not be enough to hold the entire Donbas if the enemy brings new large forces here from near Stalingrad or the Caucasus, and he will certainly do this. One could not just rely on the fact that the enemy's forces would be exhausted (although he did suffer heavy losses in battles with the German troops) or that difficulties with supplies would immediately disrupt his operations. With these arguments, Hitler usually objected to General Zeytler when he pointed out to him the overwhelming numerical superiority of the enemy, based on the basically correct intelligence data available to us. These arguments were also justified to a certain extent, but it had to be borne in mind that the enemy's battles with the allied troops cost him very few losses and that he had much more freedom in organizing the supply of troops than we (since we were on the territory opponent). Already in the next few days, our forecasts about the actions of the enemy were confirmed. His intention to press and at the same time bypass our Northern Front on the Donets became clear.

On February 2, the enemy crossed the Donets east of Voroshilovgrad; the Italians stationed there offered no serious resistance. The enemy concentrated in this area the Shock Group consisting of three tank, one mechanized and one rifle corps, apparently from the number of troops that defeated the Italian front on the Don in their time. It could be assumed that the purpose of this shock group was to capture Rostov or Taganrog.

Having knocked out the 19th TD from Starobelsk, the enemy sent

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another large grouping consisting of three or four tank corps and one rifle corps to the southwest to the Slavyansk-Lysichansk line. Obviously, he planned to cover our flank, striking far to the west, in the area near Voroshilovgrad or to the east of it, not taking into account the areas occupied by the defeated units of the Italians ...

We moved the 1st Panzer Army to the middle Donets in order to prevent the already threatening envelopment of Holliit's group.

Now it was necessary to make sure that the 4th Panzer Army, located on the lower Donui Donets, was also withdrawn from the "balcony". This was the only way to timely avert the danger that threatened in the future that the enemy, advancing on the Izyum-Slavyansk line, would try to cut us off from the crossings across the Dnieper. It was necessary to constantly reckon with the fact that the enemy would throw up new forces, in addition to those that were already near Slavyansk, in

direction up the Donets across the river and further to the lower Dnieper. Except for one division of the SS Panzer Corps, which arrived at that time in the Kharkov region, only the remnants of units opposed the enemy in the sector of Army Group B. They could not prevent the enemy from turning and moving further into our deep flank.

The 4th Panzer Army could only be freed by a significant reduction in the army group's front line. Instead of continuing to hold the large arc formed by the lower Don and Donets from Rostov to the area west of Voroshilovgrad, it was necessary to move the right flank of the group to the chord of this arc. This was the position held by the southern flank of the Germans in 1941 after the first retreat from Rostov, the position from the Mius line further north to the middle Donets. The reduction of the front to this line of positions, which, although they had since been destroyed, nevertheless gave us a certain support, meant, of course, the abandonment of the eastern part of the Donetsk coal region.

Manstein sought to convince Hitler that in order to free up troops for a counterattack, it was necessary to leave part of the Donbass along with Rostov. It depended on this

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the infantry of the planned counterattack. The field marshal recalled: "As the Chief of the General Staff told me, he himself told Hitler that the question was whether to give up the Donbass or lose it along with the Don Army Group. To this, Hitler replied that he was apparently right from an operational point of view. For military and economic reasons, however, leaving the Donbass is impossible. This is important not so much from the point of view of the loss of coal for us, but because in this case the enemy will again receive the most important coal basin necessary for the production of steel. As a way out, Hitler provided for a breakthrough by the forces of the first of the three divisions of the SS Panzer Corps, the Reich division, which arrived just in the Kharkov region, in the direction from Kharkov to the rear of the enemy troops advancing on our Donets- cue front.

_ Not to mention the fact that the forces of this division were completely insufficient for such a large operation (it had to defeat 6 enemy divisions as its immediate task) and that it was not able to cover the increasingly extended northern flank, the introduction to the battle of this one division would certainly mean the dispersal of the only striking force expected in the near future - the SS Panzer Corps. However, even this division was not actually available for the planned offensive operation. Due to the rapid advance of the Soviets in the direction of Kharkov, the command of Army Group "B" was forced to throw this division into battle. She was at that time bound by completely hopeless defensive battles northeast of Kharkov near Volchansk ...

East of Voroshilovgrad, the 6th TD, thrown into the middle Donets from the Hollidt group by order of the group command, failed to push the enemy back beyond the Donets again. She was only able to pin down the enemy on his bridgehead.

Further to the west, the enemy managed to cross the Donets on a wide front, since there were practically no forces to organize defense here. The enemy was positioned in front of Slavyansk and captured Izyum. Already problematic.

is it possible at all to withdraw the Hollidt group to the Miu-Sa line ...

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If the enemy had attacked quickly from Slavyansk to the southeast, he would have driven us out of position on the Mius. Although at that time the 1st Panzer Army with units subordinate to it, on the orders of the group command, was moving from Rostov to the middle Donets, several more days passed before this army was able to actually enter the battle. This happened because in the coastal region, the softened roads significantly impeded the movement of tank divisions, while further north the soil was very frozen and, therefore, did not limit the possibility of Russian movement.

Manstein even characterizes meteorological conditions in a very peculiar way. It turns out that they were at the same time favorable for the Russians and unfavorable for the Germans.

Hausser recalled the first battles of his corps as follows: "The implementation of the plans of the High Command of the Ground Forces (OKH) to use the SS Panzer Corps on the Eastern Front to deliver a massive counterattack was accelerated due to the rapid advance of the Red Army. It was necessary to prevent a breakthrough in our rear. Kharkov, which was an important transport, industrial and political hub, could not be lost. Parts of the SS division "Reich" were sent to cover Valuyki, since the units of "Great Germany" located there needed to be transferred to the northern flank of the Consolidated Corps, Lieutenant General Hans Kramer.

| On February 18, Hubert Lanz, commander of the mountain infantry troops, was appointed commander of the army group named after him. On this day, the Russians, having brought the 3rd Panzer Army into battle, continued the offensive on a wide front. The 320th and 298th infantry divisions were cut off the path to retreat. They were forced to make their way in heavy battles along difficult paths and with heavy losses. The SS Reich division initially held the area near Olkhovatka, west of Valuyki. It was supposed to delay the enemy east of the Donets, so that later, together with the Leibstandarte (which was already defending the bridgehead on the Doniya in the Chuguev area. - B.S.) to launch a counteroffensive in a southeast direction. However, this did not happen. SS division "Reich"

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women from both sides, alternating defensive battles with counterattacks, were forced to retreat to the west. On February 5, the 2nd SS Panzer Regiment of this division set out for its first tank attack. He managed to destroy the enemy group, which wedged between the positions of the division and the reconnaissance battalion, in conditions of very rough terrain and snow. This temporary success, however, could not delay the Soviet offensive for long.

To the southeast, in front of the Leibstandarte, the Russians threw back the outposts from the eastern bank of the Donets and approached the front line of defense. Heavy defensive battles unfolded, especially for the key position near the Pechenegs. Although the division had a front of 90 km and catastrophically lacked forces, the Russians managed to achieve only local breakthroughs.

One of these local breakthroughs, for example, was prevented on February 4, when units of the Soviet 3rd Panzer Army near the Pechenegs attacked against the 1st company of the 1st Panzergrenadier Regiment of the Leibstandarte. Its commander, Hauptsturmführer Heinz Springer, later recalled: "The Russians appear in front of our positions. They try several times to break through them, crossing the frozen Donets, but unsuccessfully. We have enough counterattack strength thanks to deep echeloned positions to push back the Russians that have broken through. We have two MS 42 machine guns per platoon, which have a devastating effect. On this day, "Papa Hausser" comes to my command post to personally verify the effectiveness of the machine guns: the Donets nald in front of our positions is a lot of corpses of Soviet soldiers. This is the result of the skilful organization of our defense." According to the testimonies of other participants in this battle, after the first waves of Soviet soldiers who had rifles were swept away by machine guns, unarmed soldiers of subsequent waves (no doubt from the newly called replacements) picked up the weapons of the dead in order to continue the fight. ".

Manstein, meanwhile, demanded from the OKH that the SS Panzer Corps "as soon as it, as a result of the acceleration of the

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The transfer pov will be concentrated at Kharkov, was sent to strike south of the Donets on Izyum, if the promised offensive of the Reich division by February 6 does not give success, which should have helped us reach Kupyansk.

The commander of the Don army group also insisted to Hitler about the "immediate transfer of the combat strength of the 13th TD and two infantry divisions [of the 7th Army to the lower Dnieper, where they were to receive new weapons and convoys - isobozes and columns 6th army. If Hitler had already refused to listen to far-conceived operational plans, then the situation surrounding these demands should at least have shown him the seriousness of the situation.

The result of this telegram was that on February 6, the Fuhrer's Condor landed with us, which was supposed to deliver me to his Headquarters. Apparently, the visit at the end of January of his chief adjutant, General Schmundt, to whom we very seriously expressed our opinion about the situation at the front and about the top military leadership, helped here, and Hitler decided to listen to me personally."

During this conversation, Manstein managed to convince the Fuhrer of the need to leave the Eastern Donbass. In these dramatic negotiations, the fate of the entire Eastern Front was decided. The field marshal recalled: "I explained to Hitler that the fate of the Eastern Front could actually be decided on the southern flank. It could be confidently expected that the enemy would bring up new forces from his strong reserves (primarily from Stalingrad) in order to cut off the southern flank. Consequently, it could not be expected that the SS Panzer Corps would be sufficient to prevent this inevitable deep detour with a counterattack. The enemy has enough strength to carry out this envelopment maneuver and at the same time cover it from the Kharkov area in a westerly direction. All the forces that could be expected as German reinforcements would not have been enough to prevent this enemy attack. It was therefore necessary to send the 4th Panzer Army, which by this time was on the march in the direction of the middle Donets, immediately after the 4th Panzer Army in order to

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she was able to thwart by this time the enveloping maneuver of the enemy between the Donets and the Dnieper, which had not yet begun, but was inevitably approaching. Only then will it be possible to restore, in cooperation with suitable reinforcements, the position on the southern wing of the Eastern Front, that is, on the entire front between the coast of the Sea of Azov and the right flank of Army Group Center. Without the withdrawal of the 4th Panzer Army from the lower Don, this would have been impossible. But withdrawing it from this section would mean the need to withdraw from the Don-Donets arc to a shorter chord on the Mius. There was no time to waste."

In this regard, it is worth noting that, in all likelihood, the decision of the Headquarters to send, after the destruction of the 6th German Army, the troops of the Rokossovsky Don Front, renamed the Central Front, to the central, and not to the southern sector of the Soviet-German front, was erroneous if it is assessed from today's positions, when we know the further course of events. If Rokossovsky's armies had advanced in the south, then Manstein's counterattack would hardly have been successful. The offensive of the Central Front, which included two armies of the former Don Front, and tank and combined arms armies, and a number of formations from the Stavka reserve, in the direction of Gomel-Smolensk, was not of fundamental strategic importance at that moment. But Stalin wanted to attack everywhere, obviously overestimating the decline in the combat capability of the Wehrmacht after Stalingrad, and his closest collaborators Vasilevsky and Zhukov either shared his point of view, or did not dare to contradict him, or, finally, failed to convince him of the need to concentrate all efforts in the south. However, judging by the memoirs of A. M. Vasilevsky, at least the General Staff fully shared the position of the front commanders on the need to attack both Kharkov and the Dnieper. Alexander Mikhailovich stated: "The strategic tasks of the enemy were to defeat advanced to the approaches to the Dnieper

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Petrovsk troops of the right wing of our Southwestern Front, push them back to the Seversky Donets and restore the interrupted communications of Army Group South, leading to crossings through

Dnieper bend. Subsequently, having regrouped forces in the area southwest of Kharkov, the enemy intended to inflict a powerful blow on the troops of the Voronezh Front, recapture Kharkov and Belgorod and, having restored the defense of his troops along the line of the Seversky Donets, continue the offensive towards Kursk. It was also envisaged that the 2nd Panzer Army of the Center Group from the area south of Orel would launch a counterattack on Kursk.

The blow that followed on February 19 for the Soviet troops of the South-Western Front, who advanced during the winter offensive to the Dnieper and were stationed not far from Zaporozhye, was extremely unexpected. By the end of February, in the course of fierce battles, the enemy managed to push our troops back beyond the Seversky Donets. How did this happen?.. The commanders of the Southwestern and Voronezh fronts misjudged the strategic situation that had developed by mid-February on this wing of the Soviet-German front. The regrouping of enemy troops that began in the tenth of February, in particular, the transfer of the SS Panzer Corps from near Kharkov to the Krasnograd region, and the 48th and 40th Panzer Corps from the left flank of the Southwestern Front to the Krasnoarmeisky Front, they perceived as the beginning of the withdrawal by the enemy of his Donbas grouping beyond the Dnieper. Based on this incorrect assessment, the commander of the Southwestern Front, N.F. Vatutin, asked the Headquarters for permission to launch a rapid offensive with all the forces of the front in order to finally defeat the enemy between the Seversky Donets and the Dnieper and reach the Dnieper even before the start of the spring thaw.

In response to this, I. V. Stalin, in negotiations with N. F. Vatutin on the night of 11 February, he said the following: until Kharkov is taken by our troops, instead of the operation "Leap" proposed by the front, it would be better to adopt another plan - with limited tasks, but more realistic at the moment. The general task of the front for the near future is to prevent the enemy from withdrawing towards Dnepropetrovsk and

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Zaporizhzhia and the forces of the entire front to take measures to squeeze the enemy's Donetsk group, push it back to the Crimea, then block up the passages through Perekop and Sivash and thus isolate it from the rest of the enemy troops in the Ukraine. The operation should be started as soon as possible, and the decision should be sent to the General Staff.

On February 17, after the liberation of Kharkov, I. V. Stalin personally informed N. F. Vatutin by telephone that the new front-line operation plan presented by him had been approved. But the Supreme Commander asked to take into account his remarks about the tasks of the 6th Army, made during the negotiations on Operation Leap. The idea was that this army should occupy Sinelnikovo, and then Zaporozhye, and not give the enemy troops the opportunity to retreat to the western bank of the Dnieper through Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye. "Other tasks, such as advancing to Kremenchug, should not be given to the sixth army yet." Thus, both the Headquarters and the General Staff made the same mistake as the commanders of the Southwestern and Voronezh fronts: they did not expect the enemy's offensive operations, considering him defeated here. The headquarters not only agreed with the proposals of the commanders on the development of a further offensive, but in its directives even expanded the plans of the fronts. At the same time, the Headquarters did not take any measures to strengthen their troops. As a result, the Southwestern Front continued to advance with fighting in the western and southwestern directions, every day increasing the width of the offensive front, which had already reached more than 400 km by the beginning of the enemy counteroffensive. In addition, as a result of continuous and lengthy offensive battles, our troops suffered heavy losses in manpower and equipment and, due to their excessive distance from supply bases, experienced an acute shortage of ammunition.

Manstein commented on the Fuhrer's argument against retreat: "Hitler kept stressing that if you fought hard for every piece of land and forced the enemy to advance at the cost of heavy losses, then one day the offensive power of even the Soviet Army would dry up. The enemy has been continuously advancing for two and a half months. He has very heavy losses, his offensive

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the gap will soon be exhausted. And the difficulties of supply at increasing distances from the starting points, apparently, will stop the deep detour planned by him. Undoubtedly, there was much truth in all this. Undoubtedly, the enemy, at least during his attack on the sectors held by the German troops, suffered heavy losses, which greatly reduced his striking power. The easier it was for him to win victories in those sectors of the front where the German troops did not offer him stubborn resistance. It is also true that the combat effectiveness of the Soviet troops, primarily the infantry, has significantly decreased as a result of the losses incurred. On the other hand, due to the multiple superiority of the enemy, we will not be able to hold out at all. And if the enemy divisions partially lost their combat effectiveness due to losses, then new divisions took their place. It is also true that as the area of operations of the Soviet Army increased, it had more difficulties in organizing supplies. Still, the distances from the enemy's final railway points to the coast of the Sea of Azov or to the lower Dnieper were not so great that in the age of motor vehicles they could disrupt the operation, so dangerous for us, to cut off the southern flank of the German army ...

With regard to the operational situation, Hitler, in fact, expressed only the opinion that the SS Panzer Corps could eliminate the serious danger to the front on the middle Donets by a strike from the Kharkov region to the southeast on Izyum. The prerequisite for this, however, must be that even before the arrival of the Leibstandarte, the Reich division could finish off the enemy at Volchansk (the third division, Gotenkopf, could arrive only later). His hope for the striking power of this newly formed SS Panzer Corps was apparently boundless. Otherwise, his considerations showed that he still does not understand or does not want to understand the dangers threatening the future, namely, the dangers associated with the appearance of enemy Stalingrad formations on the new battlefield.

According to Manstein, the transfer of the 4th Panzer

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army from near Rostov to the western flank of Army Group "Don" was supposed to take about two weeks. Her retreat across the Don began on February 7, when the Soviet troops had already taken Bataysk on the south bank of the river.

Manstein was skeptical about the possibility that the SS corps could launch a counterattack that would stop the enemy advance: "We learned that the SS Reich division, which was supposed to push the enemy back at Volchansk, in order to then move southeast to direction to Izyum, did not defeat the enemy. Moreover, she herself moved beyond the Donets. It was clear that under such conditions nothing would come of the strike planned by Hitler of the SS Panzer Corps, which so far had only the Reich division, in order to alleviate the situation on our western flank.

On February 9, the enemy captured Belgorod and Kursk north of Kharkov. It advanced from the Donsau Izyum arc to the west. Practically in the gap between the Dnieper and the right flank of the Center group, which began much north of Kursk, only the Lanz group, whose attack on Kharkov was already doubtful, operated, and west of Kursk - the badly battered 2nd Army of the Army Group "B".

Since this situation gave the enemy the opportunity to carry out a deep detour maneuver across the Dnieper above Dnepropetrovsk, it was clear that our army group would not be able to provide for a long time with its own forces, despite the transfer of the 4th Panzer Army to the western flank, the safety of its rear communications. Some drastic measures had to be taken. In a telegram addressed to General Zeitzler, therefore, I demanded the concentration of a new army with a strength of at least 5-6 divisions for two weeks in the area north of Dnepropetrovsk, as well as the concentration of another army behind the front of the 2nd Army, that is, in the area west of Kursk for strike to the south. For this, a fundamental improvement in the delivery service was necessary. The partial arrival of individual divisions at a slow pace, as it has been until now, did not meet the requirements of the situation.

Zeitzler promised Manstein 6 divisions from the

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Army Groups "North" and "Center". Meanwhile, the 1st Panzer Army, which fought at the Donets, was threatened with a two-sided coverage. Its divisions unsuccessfully tried to capture Kramatorsk. In the meantime, Soviet tanks broke through the impassable terrain west of the Krivoy Torets River, which was considered by the Germans, to the village of Grishino and cut the main communication line of Army Group Don, Dnepropetrovsk-Krasnoarmeyskoye. Manstein philosophically remarked about this: "This episode showed once again that Western concepts of impassable terrain for Russians have only a very limited meaning. The wide tracks of their tanks made it much easier to overcome obstacles, which were mud or deep snow for our tanks." The situation was complicated by the fact that the 17th Panzer Division had to be sent to fight the Soviet cavalry corps (7th Guards Cavalry Corps. - RBS), which captured the important Debaltsovo station in the rear of the line, where Hollidt's group was supposed to retreat. This group nevertheless managed to retreat behind the Mius on February 17 and take up defense there. The breakthrough at Grishin was localized with the help of the approaching SS Viking Panzer Division.

On February 12, Manstein sent a report to the OKH with an assessment of the situation. He claimed that on the front of his army group, as well as on the front of army group "B", the ratio of forces remains at the level of 1:8, while on the fronts of army groups "Center" and "North" it is only 1:4, and demanded reinforcements. The commander of the Don Army Group feared most of all that the Soviet troops advancing from Izyum would put up a barrier against Kharkov and turn south, to Pavlograd, in order to seize the crossings across the Dnieper at Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye and cut off the entire southern flank of the enemy. the German front. But, unfortunately, the Soviet Headquarters did not accept such a plan of action, the most dangerous for the Germans. Manstein was also worried that the Soviet troops could defeat the Lanz group, which was still in the formation stage (by that time only the Reich division had managed to reinforce it), and reach the Kremenchuga crossings across the Dnieper. February 13, after the liquidation of the headquarters of army group "B",

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this group became part of Army Group South, commanded by Manstein.

He stated in his memoirs that after the formal reassignment of the Lanz group to him, "for a few more days, group B" (actually Hitler) itself led the operations in this area.

The Lanz group received an order from Hitler to keep Kharkov at all costs, the loss of which could affect the prestige of Germany, as a kind of new Stalingrad. In addition, the Lanz group, with the forces of the SS Panzer Corps, which formed the core of this group, but which still consisted of two instead of three divisions, had to break through to Lozovaya in order to alleviate the position of the left flank of the South group.

Naturally, the Lanz group could only solve one of these problems on its own. She could either fight for Kharkov, or attack on the left flank of the South group. I therefore suggested to Hitler that the Lanz group should first of all abandon Kharkov and try to defeat the enemy south of Kharkov. This would have prevented the danger of an army group bypassing the Dnieper on both sides of Kremenchug. We hoped to cope on our own with the enemy, who aimed his blow at the crossings across the Dnieper near Zaporozhye and Dnepropetrovsk, by introducing the 4th Panzer Army into battle. If Lanz had defeated the enemy south of Kharkov, then he could have turned to Kharkov and captured it again. But such a decision did not correspond to the plans of Hitler, for whom Kharkiv, the capital of Ukraine (by that time Kharkiv was no longer the capital of Ukraine. — B.S.), had already become a matter of prestige. Therefore, on February 13, he gave once again a strict order to the Lanz group under all circumstances to hold Kharkov ...

As for the situation at Kharkov, the circumstances turned out to be stronger than Hitler's wishes. The SS Panzer Corps, which was already in danger of encirclement in Kharkov, retreated on February 15

- however, contrary to the order of General Lanz, - from the city. We were informed about the accomplished fact by the headquarters of group "B", which these days was in the process of

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liquidation. If Kharkov had been abandoned on the orders of some army general, then Hitler would undoubtedly have brought him to court-martial. But since it was an SS Panzer Corps, which - acting, however, quite correctly - escaped encirclement, this did not happen. True, the commander of the group, Lanz, was replaced a few days later by General of the Panzer Troops Kempf under the pretext that General Lanz belonged to the mountain rifle troops, and Kempf was a tanker (soon Lanz began to command the mountain rifle corps. - B.S.). ..

On February 16, it was reported that the enemy, as we had long expected, launched an offensive with large forces from the area west of Izyum in the direction of Pavlograd and Dnepropetrovsk. If the enemy had managed to reach the railway junction of Lozovaya or Pavlograd here (or the Sinelnikovo station located southwest of Pavlograd), then the railway connection through Poltava would have been cut. At the same time, the pace of bringing in the replenishment promised to us by the OKH again weakened. Instead of the promised 37 transports, only 6 arrived daily on February 14...

The situation became so critical that Hitler decided to come to my headquarters. My repeated reports with an assessment of the situation apparently forced him to think. No matter how much I welcomed the opportunity to report my thoughts to him personally, and also that he could personally be convinced of the seriousness of the situation, it was still, of course, difficult to ensure the safety of his stay in such a large industrial city as Zaporozhye (especially since the enemy was approaching the city). In addition, he said that he would stay for several days. He settled in our office, along with his retinue, which included the Chief of the General Staff and General Jodl (as always, Hitler took, of course, his personal chef with him). The entire surrounding area had to be hermetically isolated. Nevertheless, the situation could not be considered safe, since Hitler's arrival was not a secret, and at the entrance to the city from the airfield he was recognized and greeted by soldiers who were in Zaporozhye, representatives of his party and other persons. For protection

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we had in Zaporozhye, besides our guard company, only a few anti-aircraft units. In the near future, enemy tanks were to come so close to the city that they could fire on the airfield located east of the Dnieper.

Regarding the possibility of defending Kharkov in February 1943, Hausser wrote in his memoirs: "It was necessary to make a fundamental decision: either immediately launch an attack against the forces that bypassed the city from the south, and at the same time leave Kharkov, or let the enemy troops close to the city, so that later to conduct an all-round defense would mean a complete encirclement.

First, thanks to the withdrawal from the Donets along the Konstantinovka-Rogan-Russian Tishki line, the released forces of both divisions, which were supposed to be used for an attack in a southeasterly direction, were gathered at Merefa. Again an attempt was made to break through on the right flank in order to prevent the encirclement of Kharkov. Deep snow delayed the deployment of forces, and the inevitable mixing of units because of this complicated the preparation of troops for the offensive. Only on February 11, at 8.30 am, three strike groups moved from the Merefa bridgehead in a southerly direction. The "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" led the attack grouping, consisting of parts of both divisions, while the troops defending east and northeast of Kharkov were subordinate to the headquarters of the "Reich" division.

The attack was at first sudden and successful. Meyer's group went to the Alekseevka-Bereka area. The Soviet 6th Guards Cavalry Corps was completely dispersed. On the outer southern flank near Krasnograd, the 5th Motorized Regiment "Thule" of the division

"Dead Head", transferred here as its advanced part. The rest of the division was delayed along the way.

East of Kharkov, only two reinforced regimental groups remained. February 11 began intensive. Russian attacks with large tank forces. Some settlements and part of the territory were temporarily lost. However, the reserve forces, although relatively weak, last

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the gaps were eliminated, and the enemy suffered heavy damage. The Soviet command constantly committed more and more forces to the battle... The last reserve, the 2nd SS Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion, was transferred to the left, to the neighboring sector, when the enemy broke through there. Thus, the weak front east of Kharkov turned out to be devoid of any serious reserves. But the soldiers fought to the death. In the north, after the capture of Belgorod, Soviet troops broke through far northwest of Kharkov. More and more enemy units were being pulled up to the city. The "Great Germany" division, which was retreating from the Belgorod region with battles, had to be used to defend the northwestern sector of Kharkov. This frustrated the plan of the command of the army group "Lanz", which was going to replace the division "Reich" with the "Grossdeutschland" division, which was intended for an offensive in a southerly direction.

The 320th Infantry Division, with 1,500 wounded, withdrew fighting to Zmiev. All sanitary units of the corps, transport, as well as food services (considering that the soldiers were hungry) were put on alert. Thanks to the breakthrough of the motorized infantry battalion on armored personnel carriers of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler division on February 12, the 320th division connected with the main forces.

On February 13, General Lanz announced the Fuhrer's order to keep Kharkov at all costs. It was necessary to reduce the front even more, freeing up all possible reserves. In the evening, the headquarters of the corps reported to the command of the army group that the new line of defense could be held only until February 14, since the city was already surrounded. An order was sent to the troops to conduct reconnaissance to prepare for further withdrawal. It was ordered to blow up all warehouses, as well as structures of strategic importance.

On February 14, the enemy succeeded in breaking through our weak front in several places, consisting only of isopor points. It was necessary to fear a breakthrough to the tractor plant. In the northwest, the enemy also found gaps in the defense of the Grossdeutschland division. Thus, the most strong

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parts of the HG army corps of Lieutenant General Erhard Raus were already cut off from the lines of communication. The most important supply road Kharkov - Poltava was already in the hands of the enemy.

Since the new proposal of the headquarters of the SS Panzer Corps to surrender Kharkov was rejected with reference to the order of the Fuhrer of February 13, the corps commander (here Hausser writes to himself in the third person. - B.S.) decided to arbitrarily order the withdrawal of troops in order to avoid fighting in the encirclement and release troops for a counterattack. However, a new order from the Fuehrer to hold Kharkiv, received at 5:50 p.m., made it necessary to postpone this decision. In the evening, Soviet troops broke into the southeastern suburbs of Kharkov. The 3rd battalion of the Life Standard, thrown into the counterattack equipped with armored personnel carriers, stopped the advance of the enemy in a night battle, but could not recapture the area he had captured. In Kharkov, protests of the armed civilian population began. In this regard, the headquarters of the army group "Lani" ordered to stop the offensive of the strike group to the south, allocate reserves for the defense of the city and send a group, supported by tanks, to Valki, southwest of Kharkov, in order to clear the supply lines. This order was unfulfilled. In the evening, the commander of the SS Panzer Corps again reported on the situation, trying to achieve a decision on the surrender of Kharkov.

On the night of [February 5], the enemy penetrated even deeper into our positions in the northwestern and southeastern parts of the city. The tank battalion of the division "Reich" managed to stop the advance of the enemy in the northwestern direction with a retaliatory strike. Again, a warning came from the corps headquarters about the seriousness of the situation. Until midnight on February 15, no decision was made.

At this last moment, at 12.50, the corps commander ordered the Reich division to leave their positions and move towards Ude in battle. With the support of tanks, it was possible to withdraw troops from Kharkov at the last moment. At 1 pm this decision was reported to the headquarters of the Lani army group and reported to the headquarters of the Routh corps for information. This was followed at 16.30 by a new order from the headquarters of the army group

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py "Lanz", prescribing to continue the defense of the city at all costs. The order came too late. But at the same time, it was still possible to build a shortened line of defense, for which the available forces would be enough. On February 16, the advanced units of the Reich division attacked the city.

Hausser's decision was eventually recognized as correct by both Manstein and Hitler. The defense of Kharkov, surrounded by two elite SS Panzer divisions, hardly made sense in those conditions. Even if the SS Panzer Corps could hold the city and subsequently cut a corridor to it, its strike power would be greatly weakened in defensive battles, and it would hardly be ready for a counterattack. Dau of the same Manstein had no other forces to stop the Soviet offensive. A counterattack inflicted by the forces of one 4th Panzer Army, weakened by previous defensive battles, would hardly have led to success.

On this occasion, Hausser quite rightly remarked: "What forces then (in the case of the encirclement of two divisions of the SS-tank corps of Routh in Kharkov. - B.S.) Manstein could conduct his offensive between the Donzp and the Dnieper? Hotha's 4th Panzer Army would then consist mainly of the HEUSH Panzer Corps. She had a difficult retreat behind her after the deblocking blow to Stalingrad. In addition to this, Manstein had at his disposal - as far as I can tell - a fresh 15th Infantry Division and, at best, units of the 1st Panzer Army (SS Division "Viking"). The main forces of the 1st Panzer Army were thrown to the Mius, where the Viking was soon to be withdrawn. The former commander of the SS Panzer Corps admitted that Hitler had a plan to leave the SS divisions, along with the "Grossdeutschland" division, encircled in Kharkov in order to pin down more Soviet troops, but this threatened a new Stalingrad. Hausser rightly concluded that the abandonment of Kharkov led to the fact that "the SS Panzer Corps, formed from tested divisions, was free to attack from Krasnograll to the south by the forces of the Reich and the Dead Head to break through the path of Gotha's karmia, while

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The Leibstandarte held the line of defense on the right flank of the Army Group Kempf (formerly Lanz). These fights were not easy! Only after them did Manstein receive a springboard for the implementation of his ambitious plan. During this operation, the SS corps, and alone, again took Kharkov.

It would probably have been possible to hold Kharkov and prevent its encirclement if the Totenkopf division in full force had arrived in this area in time. However, in this case, it is not known whether Manstein's subsequent counterattack would have been so effective, since the Soviet troops would have had more forces to repel it without being diverted to hold Kharkov, taken by units of the 69th and 3rd tank armies.

Manstein convinced the Fuhrer that at the moment it was pointless to recapture Kharkov. It is more important to stop the big Soviet offensive south of the city. Army Group Kempf, west

Kharkov, the Soviet 3rd Panzer and 1st Guards Armies and Popov's front-line mobile group, advancing towards the Dnieper, could be pincered.

M. M. Popov's group bypassed Army Group "South" at Slavyansk and quickly moved towards Pavlograd and Novomoskovsk. Reconnaissance units reached Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye. Manstein had almost no troops at hand. To Novomoskovsk, the eastern half of which was already captured by the Soviet vanguards, a group of General Steinbauer, formed from vacationers and separate units at the base, was thrown from Dnepropetrovsk. headquarters of the 52nd Infantry Regiment. The 15th Infantry Division, which had unloaded in Dnepropetrovsk, sent a regimental group to cover Sinelnikov, which, however, could not be held.

The left wing of the 6th Soviet Army, part of the forces opposing the Leibstandarte, cut the Krasnograd-Novomoskovsk road. Hausser concentrated the "Reich" division in the area of Krasnograd. On February 19, she was to strike south, towards the left wing of the Leibstandarte, which was advancing north. In the 2nd Reich Panzer Regiment, which had already lost half its tanks, only one battalion remained under the command of

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Leut Sturmbannführer Tichsen. The second battalion of Sturmbannführer von Reizenstein was sent to Kyiv for reinforcements.

By February 19, 1943, in the course of Operation Leap, which had the goal of liberating the Donbass, the troops of the Southwestern Front reached the following lines. The 6th Army, which occupied a front of 200 km, reached the Zmiev-Krasnograd-Novomoskovsk-Pavlograd line; The 1st Guards Army occupied the Pavlograd-Slavyansk line 60 km from the front; mobile front group under the command of General M.M. Popova reached the line Slavyansk - Kramatorsk - Krasnoarmeiskoye with a length of 80 km.

As early as February 17, in the zone of the 6th Army, the 1st Guards Tank Corps, advancing on Dnepropetrovsk, and the 25th Tank Corps, whose target was Zaporozhye, were introduced into the gap. Further development of success was also planned. Tank formations of the 6th Army and Popov's group were to advance towards Zhdanov in order to encircle Army Group South in the Donbass. On February 19, the 25th Panzer Corps took Sinelnikovo, cutting off the main communications of Army Group South. His forward brigade was only 60 km northeast of Zaporozhye. Popov's group, repelling the counter-attacks of the German HG. tank corps, advanced south of Krasnoarmeysk.

By that time, two divisions of the SS Panzer Corps were threatening the right flank of the 6th Army, and the tank corps, which was completing its concentration in the Gulyai-Pole area, HEMUSH, threatened the left flank of the 6th Army and the tank corps that had entered the gap.

The GUP Panzer Corps, located east of the KHEUSH Panzer Corps, was to strike northward against the 1st Guards Tank Army.

Shi HE tank corps of the German 1st Panzer Army, in turn, were supposed to encircle and destroy Popov's mobile group with convergent attacks on Slavyansk. Manstein was forced to put the HG tank corps into action on February 10 in order to localize the breakthrough of the 4th Guards Tank Corps in the Krasnoarmeisky area.

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After leaving Kharkov, the situation was seen by Hausser as follows: "Soviet troops with the large tank forces of General Popov at Slavyansk outflanked Army Group Don. Popov moved rapidly through Pavlograd to the banks of the Dnieper. His intelligence has already reached Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye. There were almost no combat units here. The group of Lieutenant General Gerhard Steinbauer, assembled from vacationers and the remnants of broken units,

was able to occupy the area west of Novomoskovsk, covering Dnepropetrovsk from the north. The 15th Infantry Division was transferred to Dnepropetrovsk and provided cover for the city from the east.

The southern grouping of the 6th Soviet Army, whose significant forces were standing in front of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler front, began encircling the tank corps from the south and had already crossed the Novomoskovsk-Krasnograd highway with advanced columns of several divisions. The situation demanded that immediate measures be taken to save Army Group Don.

After leaving Kharkov, both SS divisions were again put on alert. The "Reich" division concentrated in Krasnograd. On February 19, she set out to deliver a decisive blow to the south. The offensive was supported from the area northeast of Krasnograd by local attacks by the Leibstandarte against the enemy advancing from the east. The Leibstandarte, after the gradual withdrawal of its left flank, established itself on a new line of defense next to Routh's corps. The troops were able to breathe a sigh of relief. Finally, the days of retreat were over and the hour of a retaliatory attack had come. The seriousness of the situation and the decisive importance of the forthcoming battle were clear to every soldier.

The attack began at dawn. The SS division advanced from its starting areas in three groups. The first task was to defeat the enemy strike group, which was preparing for an offensive east of Krasnograd. It was a fierce fight; at first the attack developed with difficulty. The main obstacle - the Orel tributary in the south - was overcome in the late afternoon. The attack was continued at night under the personal leadership of the commander of the 3rd Motorized Regiment "Deutschland"

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SS Tenführer Heinz Harmel, and in a heavy night battle against a discouraged enemy, such an important bridgehead was captured. The Führer's radiogram only emphasized the importance of this moment. But the onslaught of the troops could no longer be stopped even without this. The tip of the tank wedge was moving south at night. Blow after blow was inflicted on the flanks of the enemy columns moving to the west. One persecution group was replaced by another until on February 20 at 2 p.m. the advanced units of the SS reached Novomoskovsk and joined the Steinbauer group.

As early as February 17, Manstein reported to Hitler, who again flew to Zaporozhye, the plan for a counterattack. The SS Panzer Corps was to advance from the Krasnograd region to the southeast in the general direction of Pavlograd. Here, the 4th Panzer Army arriving in the area was supposed to come to the rescue. Together they were supposed to defeat the Soviet troops attacking the Lanz groups and the 1st Panzer Army. After that, it was supposed to strike in the Kharkov region and again capture the second capital of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, on February 18, the Soviet 267th Rifle Division appeared south of Krasnograd, and the 35th Guards Rifle Division occupied Pavlograd, which the Italian division stationed there surrendered without resistance. On the same day, the SS Panzer Division "Gotenkampf" unloaded in Kyiv, but its advance to Poltava was hampered by mudslides. Hitler approved Manstein's decision to send the Reich division to Pavlograd. The Leibstandarte had to defend itself south of Kharkov.

On February 19, Soviet troops occupied the Sinelnikovo station, 60 km from Zaporozhye. In the evening of the same day, Hitler left the city.

On this day, Manstein issued an order to the 4th Panzer Army to launch an offensive towards the line of Pereshchepino - Pavlograd - Grishino. On February 21, she occupied Pavlograd. The Soviet group advancing to the Dnieper was defeated. Manstein estimated its strength at two tank, one rifle and one cavalry corps. Then, in cooperation with the 1st Panzer Army, the Soviet grouping was defeated.

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in front of this army. Manstein believed that it consisted of four tank and mechanized corps. By March 2, the battle was over.

Air reconnaissance of the South-Western Front discovered the regrouping carried out by Manstein, but the front command regarded it as the enemy's intention to begin the withdrawal of the main formations of Army Group South beyond the Dnieper, and to cover its withdrawal, throw tank divisions towards the advancing Soviet troops. The Stavka agreed with Vatutin and authorized an operation to defeat the Donbass grouping of the enemy and reach the Dnieper.

Since the Reich, which launched an offensive on February 19 with a strike from Poltava, captured Novomoskovsk on the Samara River on February 20, and the next day the Leibstandarte approached Pavlograd, the advancing Soviet units were trapped south of Samara. The 4th Rifle Corps of the 6th Army came under attack. His divisions offered fierce resistance, and the enemy failed to break through the front of the corps. But he had to retreat to the area north of Pavlograd.

The commander of the Southwestern Front, General N.F. Vatutin, still thought that the counterattack of the SS Panzer Corps was just an attempt to cover the withdrawal of the main forces of Army Group South beyond the Dnieper, and ordered the offensive to continue. It was a fatal miscalculation. There was still time, having stopped the offensive, to throw the tank corps, rushing to the Dnieper, to repulse the enemy counterattack and prevent the impending catastrophe. On the night of February 21, the commander of the mobile group M. M. Popov, unlike the commander of the front, who assessed the situation as very serious, asked for permission to withdraw the corps to the line 40-50 km north of Krasnoarmeyskoye, but was refused, and at the headquarters Front emphasized that "this is contrary to the task assigned to the group."

On February 21, the 4th Guards, 10th and 18th Tank Corps of Popov's mobile group, which by that time had only 40 tanks left in service, repulsed the counterattacks of the German KhG. tank corps, continued the offensive south of Krasnoarmeisky. 25th Panzer Corps
approached

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Zaporozhye, and the 1st Guards Tank Corps - to Dnepropetrovsk.

On February 22, the next stage of the German counteroffensive began. HEUSCH tank corps from Gulyaipol hit on Pavlograd, GUP tank corps launched an offensive against the 1st Guards Army. At the same time, after a powerful artillery preparation, the XE corps of the 1st German Panzer Army struck from Selidovo to Barvenkovo, and the III Panzer Corps to Slavyansk, creating a threat of encirclement of Popov's mobile group.

As a result, the 1st Guards Tank Corps had to retreat east of Pavlograd. Many units of the 6th Army were encircled and destroyed. Also, the main forces of the Popov group were destroyed by formations of the XE tank corps, which included the 7th and [11th tank divisions, the SS Viking division and the 333rd infantry division.

After the HEUSCH Panzer and Panzer Corps of the SS joined forces in Pavlograd on February 23, the 25th Panzer Corps and the 106th Separate Rifle Brigade, located just 25 km north of Zaporozhye, which reached the southeastern outskirts of Dnepropetrovsk, were cut off from the main forces of the 6th Army, from which they broke away by almost 100 km.

On February 23, Vatutin reported to Headquarters that German tank corps had broken through in the area of operation of the 6th Army and Popov's mobile group. But only on February 25 he was allowed to withdraw the right wing of the front to the line of the Seversky Donets.

On this day, Manstein had already sent both of his tank armies north to prepare an attack on Kharkov. |-Yatanka army was supposed to take Petrovskoye and Izyumiya to cut off the escape route for the encircled Soviet troops through the Donets, and the 4th Panzer Army was to advance on Lozovaya and further by rail to Kharkov.

On February 27, the 3rd Panzer Army of the Voronezh Front launched a counterattack on the flank of the SS Panzer Corps, which was advancing against the 6th Army. The villages of Varvarovka and Kegichevka to the east of Krasnograd were taken. However, soon 20 tanks of the 12th Panzer Corps and 19 tanks of the 15th Panzer Corps

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got up due to lack of fuel and ended up in the "cauldron" themselves. The encirclement front was not dense, but the Soviet units retreating along the flat terrain suffered heavy losses from enemy aircraft and tanks.

The 25th tank corps was almost completely destroyed. The 106th separate rifle brigade was more fortunate. She was able, evading collisions with the enemy, to pass Pereshchepino, Sakhnovshchina, Krasnopol'skoye, Kochichevka, Alekseevskoye, moving after the advancing German divisions, and in March broke through the front line south of Chuguev almost without loss. 5627 people left the encirclement, which practically corresponded to the staffing of the brigade. Of this number, only 127 were wounded, which indicates that, both during the movement to the Dnieper and during the exit from the encirclement, the brigade had almost no fights. She also succeeded completely save artillery and equipment.

Meanwhile, the German HG. The tank corps destroyed all the tanks of the 18th tank corps from Popov's group, which broke through to Selidovo, and pushed the corps back to the area south of Krasnoarmeyskoye. The 4th Guards Tank Corps was defending in the city itself, while the 10th Tank Corps was fighting west of Krasnoarmeysky.

The deep snow cover forced the tanks to operate only along the main roads, which made it difficult for Soviet tank units to escape the encirclement.

The 3rd Tank Corps, having been replaced in Kramatorsk by the 57th Guards Rifle Division, headed for Krasnoarmeysk. On February 23, near Andreevka, he was stopped by the XO tank corps, supported by dive bombers. The 4th Guards, 10th and 18th Tank Corps withdrew from Krasnoarmeysk in the direction of the Seversky Donets and on February 26 took up defensive positions next to the 3rd Tank Corps.

At this time, the 52nd and 57th Guards Rifle Divisions were defending, respectively, in Slavyansk and Kramatorsk against the German 3rd Tank Corps.

On February 27, Popov's mobile group finally received permission to withdraw to the Seversky Donets. The Headquarters was forced to part with dreams of an early rush to the Dnieper. But from

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the move was too late, and the tank corps retreating to Barvenkovo left almost all the armored vehicles to the enemy.

The 57th Guards Rifle Division left Kramatorsk at 6 pm on February 28 and by March 1 took up defensive positions in Slavyansk, but did not stay here for long. On the night of March 3, in order to avoid encirclement, the division crossed the Seversky Donets and took up defensive positions in the Krasny Liman area.

The Germans tried to cross the Seversky Donets in order to bypass Kharkov from the east and encircle the city. However, on February 28, in the region of Balakliya KHEMUSH, the tank corps failed when trying to cross the Donets and develop an offensive against Kupyansk. Until March 10, divisions of the [th Guards Cavalry Corps] successfully defended here. The defenders were helped by the fact that the ice on the Donets melted and it was impossible to transfer armored vehicles across the river. After this failure, Manstein began to consider the offensive of the HEUSCH corps only as a diversionary blow, transferring the main blow to the offensive zone of the SS Panzer Corps.

On February 26, the Reich division occupied Lozovaya after fierce street fighting. On February 28, the 17th Panzer Division took Petrovskoe.

By March 4, the 6th and 1st Guards Armies and Popov's mobile group withdrew beyond the Seversky Donets, occupying the Balakleya-Krasny Liman line and holding a small bridgehead in the bend of the Donets, south of Balakleya. The Soviet troops were weakened by the encirclement and did not have time to create a solid defense. They were short of fuel and ammunition.

Meanwhile, the German GUP Panzer Corps and the 17th Panzer Division XE\USh Panzer Corps took up defensive positions on the southern bank of the Seversky Donets.

The Soviet forces facing them were now low on fuel and other supplies, although their infantry units held firm in some sectors. Now the German 4th Panzer Army of Hoth was advancing on Kharkov, and the 1st Panzer Army of von Mackensen was advancing towards the Donets.

This is how the first stage of the counteroffensive of the SS Panzer Corps took place, according to the data contained in the corpus

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public and divisional journals of combat operations and in the post-war memoirs of corps officers.

On February 17, Hausser, on the Fieseler Storch, visited the battle group of the Leibstandarte, which had reached Taranovka. Then he flew to the command post of the army group Lanz. Here Hausser was ordered to withdraw his corps behind Mzhu in order to prepare for the counterattack planned by Manstein. In the meantime, the Totenkopf division finally gathered in full strength.

On February 18, the following order was received from Lanz's headquarters: "On February 19, no later than 9 o'clock, the SS Panzer Corps leaves the Krasnograd sector with the reinforced Reich division, proceeding south through Pereshchepino and Novomoskovsk. The goal of the day is Pereshchepino. Armored train 62 will be assigned to it, it will arrive at the Krasnograd railway station at 18 o'clock and will operate along the road leading to Pereshchepino. The order to continue the attack to the east will follow." The Reich division was to link up with the 4th Panzer Army in order to cut off the Soviet formations that had broken through to the Dnieper.

On February 19, the long-awaited offensive began. On this day, the Soviet 6th Infantry Division was supposed to take Krasnograd, but the SS men were ahead of it. At five o'clock in the morning, Obersturmbannführer Heinz Harmel's reinforced Regiment Deutschland attacked from the Natalino bridgehead in a southerly direction. The 1st strike group, consisting of a reinforced |th motorized infantry battalion, most of the Reich tanks and assault guns, as well as the 14th anti-aircraft company, moved to Otrada. The 2nd strike group, including the 2nd battalion, protected the flank of the |th group from attacks from the east. The 3rd battalion operated in the second echelon following the |th battalion. |

The commander of the 16th sapper company of the Deutschland, Obersturmführer Heinz Maher, recalled:

"The weather was extremely bad, fog, sleet, piercing and damp cold ... 50-60 people remained in the companies ... People believed that this would be a decisive day that would return success to German weapons.

The commander of the regiment Harmel constantly risks his life, so a cover team has been formed for constantly

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3 - Sokolov

his escort. It includes: three self-propelled anti-aircraft machine guns from the 14th company, a group of motorcyclists from the 15th company and a strike group from the 16th company.

The enemy is pouring mortars and machine guns over the regiment. The grenadiers are forced to seek cover. We bear the first losses. The wounded are bandaged with individual dressing bags. Nobody wants to evacuate...

The fog is heavy with lead. The terrain gently drops in the direction of the enemy. A piercing wind is blowing from the southeast into our faces. Every step is worth the effort. People loaded their boxes of ammunition, machine guns and heavy mortars onto sleds made back in France...

The sappers who set out to search for mines hold bayonets in their hands. The batteries of mine detectors have long been discharged. These people have no right to make a mistake: One wrong move and they will fly into the air. They must believe in themselves. The sappers feel the snow with their hands and move the frozen mines away with their bayonets. They have been engaged in this work for some time and have already collected and destroyed 30 mines. The passage in the minefield is open.

The regiment commander was waiting for this moment. He raises his hand: "Forward!" and the attack begins. The regiment sets in motion, at first hesitantly. The commander stands in the turret of his reconnaissance vehicle. He gives orders by making hand signals. The enemy has been pushed back from forward positions. Grenadiers of the 1st battalion sit on the armor of tanks and assault guns. 20-mm anti-aircraft guns are advanced to the left and right ... Tanks and assault guns open fire on identified targets, and the attack continues, the first enemy columns retreating to the east are broken and defeated. We are advancing faster and faster among the enemies, seized by panic.

By noon, the SS reached the Abazovka line, a crossroads 12 kilometers southeast of Krasnograd-Berek. At 5 p.m., Heinz Harmel's battalions took Otrada. In the evening, several tanks under the command of SS Hauptsturmführer Tichsen, together with the 3rd Battalion of the Deutschland Regiment, took to the road leading to Pereshchepino. The Tikhshen tank battalion then had 56 tanks, including 33 T-1Sh,

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7 T-X and one T-UG. There was also a division of 15 75-mm assault guns. The following day, the Deutschland Regiment moved even deeper into the flank of the 6th Soviet Army.

The Fuhrer Regiment, one battalion of which fought in the Voroshilovgrad region from January 23 to March 7, 1943, joined the offensive in the afternoon of February 19 to reach Pereshchepin at dawn the next day. At night, the 3rd battalion of the Deutschland regiment crossed the Orel River and captured Pereshchepino. This lightning attack, carried out by tanks and assault guns, on which the battalion soldiers were stationed, with fire support from 20-mm anti-aircraft half-track guns of the 14th company of the Deutschland regiment, turned out to be sudden for the defending Soviet units, not equipped with tanks and anti-tank guns. The battalion commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Günther Ebergard Wisliceny, at the very end of the war, after the death of Hitler, who became the only holder of the Knight's Cross with oak leaves and swords in the Deutschland regiment, recalled this battle as follows:

"The 3rd battalion, having all the troubles attached ahead: tanks, on which the escort infantrymen climbed, moves forward in a bright winter night and crosses the Russian lines of a single shot. The Russian sentries took us for their own. The bridge in Pereshchepino is guarded by two sentries. They let us through without stopping. Having reached the other shore, we destroy both sentries. Suddenly we are fired upon from Pereshchepino, which we take after a short fight. Ober Sturmbannführer Harmel wants to immediately start the pursuit. However, I seek a respite to replenish fuel and ammunition. One company remains to cover the bridge in Pereshchepino, Harmel also remains there with his escort. The rest of the battalion continues to move forward at night. At dawn, an energetic attack allows us to capture Dmitrievka, where we wait for the Fuhrer regiment. For me, the night attack on Pereshchepino was one of the most daring in the entire war.

After the capture of Pereshchepin, the Reich division received

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an order to advance one battalion to Novomoskovsk, reinforced with artillery, tanks and assault guns.

At 5:00 am on February 20, the Führer Regiment overtook the Deutschland Regiment to continue their advance south. The 3rd Battalion "Führer" cut off the supply lines of the Soviet 6th Army. Supported by dive-bombers, tank subunits captured Gubinikha at 0635, then, after fierce fighting, they took Maryanovka and Nikolaevka at 1100 and at 1400 joined Steinbauer's group in Novomoskovsk. This advance was facilitated by the continued support of the dive bomber attacks, which inflicted heavy losses on the Soviet troops. In the afternoon, Soviet troops launched a counterattack from the Andreevka area on the positions of the 2nd battalion of the Deutschland regiment, repulsed with artillery support. During the retreat, the Soviet units threw several guns.

In two days, the Reich division fought 90 kilometers from Krasnograd to Novomoskovsk. The headquarters of the SS corps reported: "As a result of fierce fighting, partly at night, on February 19 and 20, the Reich division advanced 90 kilometers along the Krasnograd, Pereshchepino, Novomoskovsk road and established contact with our troops near Novomoskovsk. The Leibstandarte division defeated the enemy in front of its right wing and held the Voroshilovo line (25 kilometers east of Krasnograd), Paraskoveya, heights west of Taranovka, Borki station.

On February 20, the divisions of the corps, including the Totenkopf division that had just arrived in full force, received the following tasks:

"[1] The division "Reich" deploys its combat units on the bridgehead it seized in Novomoskovsk and holds it. With a reinforced regimental group of the Führer regiment, it will launch an offensive from the bridgehead on February 21 to capture Pavlograd. It is necessary to leave the regimental group in the region of Pereshchepino (exclusively), Dmitrievka, Gubinikha (inclusive), with the task of providing cover from the east. Parts of the cover will remain on the Pereshchepino, Otrada, Kras

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nograd to protect the highway. Upon the arrival of the first units of the Totenkopf division, they join them.

2) The Totenkopf division is going on February 21 in the Pereshchepino area (inclusive), Krasnograd (inclusive). The first units to arrive on the line will relieve the Reich division.

3) The command post of the corps will be in Krasnograd.

Meanwhile, one of the "Reich" battalions was attacked by two Soviet battalions, and he had to retreat to Gubinikha. The reconnaissance battalion of the division penetrated 60 kilometers into Soviet positions in the forests east of Novomoskovsk.

On February 21, the divisions "Reich" and "Gotenkopf", together with the headquarters of the SS Panzer Corps, become subordinate to the 4th Panzer Army of Hermann Goth. The Leibstandarte was left in the army group Kempf.

On February 22, the Reich division was to advance to the south and southwest and destroy the enemy east and northeast of Sinelnikovo. The Totenkopf division was to advance to the crossings across Samara north of Pavlograd. While the Führer Regiment was defending north and east of Pavlograd, elements of the motorcycle and infantry battalion of the Reich division established contact during the day with the SS division Viking, fighting to the south as part of the KhGUSH Panzer Corps. A significant part of the 6th Soviet Army was surrounded.

On February 22, around noon, the Deutschland regiment with attached tanks attacked in a southerly direction and at 14.30 took the village of Zaitsevo. At 14.42 Reich's tanks linked up with the 15th Infantry Division in Sinelnikov. The attack was supported by the 77th dive bomber squadron.

On February 23, the headquarters of the 4th Panzer Army ordered the SS Panzer Corps "to continue the attack north of Samara with the forces of the Totenkopf division in order to free the crossings near Pavlograd." Field Marshal von Manstein writes: "The past days have brought the expected successes to the counterattack of the 4th Panzer Army and, finally, a new transfer of initiative to the German side in this campaign. The army destroyed the enemy forces advancing to the crossings across the Dnieper, that is, the enemy

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Russian grouping around and south of Pavlograd. What Hitler did not want to take into account is confirmed. Here we are talking about two tank, one infantry and one cavalry corps of the enemy.

On the same day, February 23, in rain and fog, the Fuhrer regiment repelled an attack from the northeast directed at Pavlograd and occupied the forest northwest of the city. Division "Totenkopf" goes to attack in | one in the morning and takes the All Saints at 5 in the morning. The attacking units slowly advanced towards Vyazovka, having destroyed seven T-34 tanks, and in the evening captured the northwestern outskirts of the town.

The regimental group of Heinz Harmel carried out a cleansing operation east of the railway line and the Sinelnikovo-Pavlograd highway and destroyed a Soviet rifle regiment. The motorized infantry battalion of the "Reich" division did the same north of the Novomoskovsk-Pavlograd highway. At the end of the day, the Deutschland regimental group entered into battle with two Soviet regiments near Maryevka. The Soviet troops, surrounded south of the Novomoskovsk-Pavlograd road, were attacked by the German 15th Infantry Division. And the Totenkopf division was given the task of breaking through the Verbock defenses of the enemy, capturing Orelka and the crossroads to the south of it, in order to then attack in the direction of Lozovaya.

On the night of February 24, northwest of Pavlograd, the 16th company of Untersturmführer Maher from the Deutschland Regiment had to fight off a counterattack by Soviet infantry and tanks. Tank destroyers from the 2nd Battalion of the Führer Regiment came to the aid of the sappers. Their 88 mm anti-aircraft guns destroyed four T-34 tanks.

The Fuhrer Regiment attacked Verbki and, with the help of dive bombers, broke the enemy's stubborn resistance at about 2 p.m. and captured the northern and eastern outskirts of the village. The Totenkopf division crushed the resistance of the Soviet troops to the north and captured Vyazovka at 13:45. The avant-gardes of Reich and Totenkopf joined at Verbki. Obersturmbannführer Otto Kumm of the Reich described the event as follows: "The leading companies came under tank fire from a height of about 500 meters. To your

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to his surprise, we understand that these are our own. Soon we manage to identify each other. This is the armored vanguard of the Totenkopf division. In this way we linked up with units of the SS Panzer Corps advancing from the northeast. Fortunately, our Fuhrer Regiment suffered no losses."

The report of the headquarters of the SS Panzer Corps spoke of the first results of the counterattack: "The settlement of Orelka in the bend of the Orel River was also taken by the reconnaissance battalion of the TGotenkopf division, which approached from the west along the Orel and provided cover for the corps from the northern flank. In addition, this extension of the left wing is especially favorable for continuing the attack to the northeast.

The fact that the enemy's advancing forward units have been cut off does not by any means make him incapable of new attacks. The bulk of the Soviet 1st Guards Army was still in

ways; the enemy seems to think that the defender, who suddenly went on the offensive, should soon run out of breath.

He drew new forces against the Leibstandarte front. Parts of Popov's group are already blockaded by the 1st German Panzer Army operating to the right of the SS corps. At the same time, five enemy tank corps are still on the march to the southwest against the 4th Panzer Army.

The warming that came around after February 20 favors an offensive operation. The point is to prevent the enemy retreating to the northeast from escaping, but to stop him and defeat him.

The order of the headquarters of the corps No. 6 of February 24 stated:

«1) The enemy is destroyed to the south and north of the Samara sector, squeezed by two divisions. The army commander expressed his special gratitude. We must count on the arrival of powerful enemy forces from the northeast. Some tanks were spotted by aerial reconnaissance in the sector north of Vyazovka.

2) On February 25, at dawn, the SS Panzer Corps takes Lozovaya and Tsanyutino.

3) The following will be put into action at dawn: a) the Reich division from the area around Verbock with its main composition through

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Morozovsky, Yurievka, Zhemchuzhnoye on Lozovaya; 6) SS division "Totenkopf" from the area around Orelka on Panyutino. Crossroads 177 (15 kilometers north of Panyutino) must be captured by units.

On February 25, at dawn, at 4:30, the Reich division launched an attack on Lozovaya. The Thule regiment of the Totenkopf division was sent to help, moving on motorcycles and amphibious vehicles.

In 45 minutes "Reich" took possession of the village of Zhemchuzhnoye. At 2 pm the Fuhrer Regiment reached the southern approaches to Lozovaya, while the Deutschland Regiment attacked Vesele. From the southern outskirts of the Lozova unit of the Soviet 1st Guards Army, they exchanged fire with the Fuhrer regiment. They managed to surround the 9th company of the 3rd battalion of this regiment, which had to spend two days surrounded. Only by the evening of February 25 did the Germans succeed in capturing the Lozova railway station.

The reinforced regiment "Deutschland" and the motorcycle-rifle battalion "Reich" reached the southern part of Samoilovo and attacked the enemy east of Vesely. The SS division "Totenkopf" attacked with the forces of its 3rd SS infantry regiment east of Orelka, meeting fierce resistance from the Soviet troops. The report of the Totenkopf division stated that in a day it destroyed 22 tanks and 2 reconnaissance armored vehicles of the enemy. This number seems to be greatly exaggerated, even if we are talking about damaged tanks.

On the night of February 26, the Führer Regiment and the Reich motorcycle rifle battalion slowly advanced towards the center of Lozovaya, meeting stubborn resistance. The 3rd battalion found itself surrounded in the western part of the city and held out only because the Soviet units opposing it were subjected to constant attacks by German dive bombers. At 4 p.m., Reich cut the railway line leading to the northwest, but Soviet troops continued to resist in the area of new factories on the northwestern outskirts of Lozova. By that time, only 14 T-1Sh tanks, 5 T-1U tanks, 3 command tanks and 16 assault guns remained in the Reich division. February 24 and 25

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the division destroyed 16 Soviet tanks. All day she fought fierce street battles. In the evening, at 19:00, the Soviet troops counterattacked, but were forced to retreat, having lost 6 T-34 tanks and 20 guns.

The Totenkopf division continued its advance to the north with the forces of the 3rd SS Panzer Regiment, but soon it became known about the death of the division commander Theodor Eicke. His plane was shot down a kilometer southeast of Artelny. SS-Brigadeführer Max Simon was immediately appointed as the new commander of the Totenkopf. Only on February 27, Eicke's body was delivered to the location of the division.

On February 27, after a strike by dive bombers on the north-eastern part of Lozova, the Deutschland Regiment launched an attack east of Lozova at 8 o'clock, while the motorcycle rifle battalion attacked the north-eastern outskirts of the city at 10 o'clock. The SS managed to capture Veseloe and a part of the railway line near the tiling factory. The Soviet troops retreated to the northeast, pursued by the 1st Battalion and the 16th Engineer Company of the Deutschland Regiment. At the same time, the Fuehrer Regiment was conducting a cleansing of Lozova. The Totenkopf division captured Tsaredarovka and Panyu-TINO.

On February 28, a thaw began, and the pursuit of the Soviet troops slowed down. The Deutschland Regiment occupied Nikolaevka, Blagochenskoye, Novo-Bunakovo and Otradovo. The Fuehrer Regiment fought Soviet infantry and tanks in the region of Razdolia and occupied the village by 5 p.m. Then the regiment resumes its progress to the north.

On the evening of February 28, the command of the 4th Panzer Army reported to Manstein: "After a week of heavy offensive battles against a strong and very determined enemy, units of the 4th Panzer Army not only contributed to the elimination of the threat to the rear of the army group, but also captured the area in depth 120 and 100 kilometers wide. The 25th Russian Tank Corps with three tank and one motorized brigades, the 35th Guards Division, the 41st Guards Division, the 244th and 267th Rifle Divisions and the 106th Rifle Brigade were badly battered, some from under them

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divisions were destroyed ... In the period from February 21 to February 28, 156 tanks, 24 reconnaissance armored vehicles, 178 artillery pieces, 284 anti-tank guns, 40 anti-aircraft guns were captured or destroyed. 4643 prisoners were captured and about 11,000 enemy corpses were found ... "

At this time, the Leibstandarte was defending on a wide front, inflicting heavy losses on the advancing Soviet troops, and did not allow them to break through to Poltava. On February 28, the right wing of the division was attacked. The Soviet command transferred here two tank corps and three rifle divisions of the 3rd Panzer Army from the Lyubotin-Valki area. However, the attack was not successful.

The remaining divisions of the SS corps continued | March offensive in a northwestern direction, trying to capture the heights east of the Berek-Efremovka line. The 4th Panzer Army tried to reach the Donets with its right wing, while the SS Panzer Corps was to capture the heights at Efremovka and establish contact with the Leibstandarte.

| March, despite almost continuous rain, the Reich division by evening occupied the heights northwest of Bereka. The Fuehrer Regiment broke through to Efremovka.

On the night of March 2, three Reich strike groups, supported by assault guns, attacked this village, destroying 13 Soviet tanks, and completely captured Efremovka by 10 o'clock in the morning. With the help of the Totenkopf division, the Reich division, turning to the west, destroyed the Soviet units operating against the Leibstandarte. At midnight on March 3, the Leibstandarte was reincorporated into the SS Panzer Corps.

Paul Hausser summed up this stage of the counteroffensive in his memoirs as follows: "The army wanted to reach the Donets with its right wing, while the SS corps had to restore communication

with the right wing of the army group Kempf. The attack continued | and 2 March. We were able to ascertain the result of this attack: the recently arrived Soviet forces advanced into the gap between the attacking SS Panzer Corps and the defensive front of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler. Thus, the right wing of the Totenkopf division was outflanked. The enemy tried to free himself from the encirclement

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nia to the southeast and northeast. In vain! The main part of these troops was overturned by the Totenkopf division with the support of units of the Reich divisions and the Leibstandarte and defeated around Eremeevka during three days of fighting. The ground attack squadrons that accompanied the division's attack achieved great success. Several enemy units broke through and created a threat to our rear. They were destroyed."

On the night of March 3, a blizzard covered high snowdrifts that hinder traffic. You have to put chains on the wheels.

At dawn on March 3, Soviet forces tried to break out of the encirclement in a northerly direction. Their number, according to German estimates, exceeded 100,000 people. The SS divisions at that time experienced supply difficulties. For several days the soldiers did not receive hot food. The Soviet avant-garde, with the forces of about two regiments, attacked units of the Führer Regiment of the Reich Division in Medvedevka and a motorcycle and infantry battalion of the same division in Lozovaya. However, the attack was repulsed, and the encircled had to retreat to the south-southeast. During the retreat, they, in turn, surrounded the 2nd battalion and part of the 1st battalion of the 1st motorized infantry regiment "Thule" south of Kotlyarovka. The 3rd Panzer Grenadier Battalion of the Führer Regiment came to the rescue. Both Soviet regiments were pushed back north of the Leninsky plant. 9 Soviet tanks were destroyed. The retreating Soviet units also fired on the convoy of the 3rd battalion of the Thule regiment south of Lozovaya.

The "Totenkopf" division forms assault groups that attack scattered Soviet columns trying to get out of the "cauldron". .

On the night of March 3-4, Soviet columns, with the strength of a company up to a battalion, along with tanks, crossed the highway on both sides from Efremovka to the north. Shortly after midnight, the headquarters of the SS Panzer Corps in Krasnoye received the following report from the Reich division: "The commander of the 3rd Russian Panzer Army is at Yermeevka, the commander of the 15th Soviet Guards Tank Corps is south of Lozovaya".

On March 4, after a heavy battle, the 2nd Battalion of the Führer Regiment

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and the 1st battalion of the Deutschland regiment, with the support of the 4th artillery battalion and the 1st battery of the 2nd anti-aircraft division, captured the village of Okhoochee. Four T-34 tanks were destroyed and 29 Soviet artillery pieces become part of the booty of the Das Reich division. The 1st battalion of the Deutschland regiment reached the beginning of the Berestovaya area.

The 111th, 184th and 219th Rifle Divisions, the 15th Guards Tank Corps with the 113th Tank Brigade, the 52nd Tank Brigade, units of the 12th Tank and 6th Guards Cavalry Corps ended up in the "boiler". scattered around Mironovka and Grushino.

At Eremeevka, the Totenkopf division closed the "cauldron". She destroyed 24 tanks. In the area of Krasnoye, Bereka and Efremovka, units of the headquarters and convoy of the 1st battalion of the Deutschland regiment fought with the Soviet troops trying to break through. The guards of the corps command post in Krasnoye knocked out one T-34 tank. The Leibstandarte captured Stanichnoye with its right-flank units. The Reich division fought a heavy battle in the Berestovaya area.

After a week of continuous fighting, the forces of the SS Panzer Corps were noticeably weakened. This was especially true of the Reich division, which had been at the front since January 30, 1943. The Totenkopf division, which entered the battle on February 22, was in the best position.

On March 5, this division completed the liquidation of the encircled Soviet units. The headquarters of the SS Panzer Corps reported on this occasion: "The SS division 'Totenkopf' achieved an outstanding success, destroying the encircled enemy. It destroyed or captured the bulk of two tank corps and three rifle divisions. The trophies are very significant: 36 tanks, 11 reconnaissance armored vehicles, 159 artillery pieces, 32 mortars, 117 anti-tank rifles, 70 machine guns, 520 trucks, 352 horse teams. 3,000 enemy corpses were found."

The Reich division cleared the northwestern coast of Berestovaya and moved to the Soviet stronghold Novaya Vodolaga.

With the defeat of the 6th Soviet Army and Panzer Group Po

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pov in the Soviet front there was a gap 200 kilometers wide. Now Manstein decided to attack directly on Kharkov, hoping to destroy the Soviet troops stationed in the area.

Manstein summed up the results of the first stage of the counteroffensive as follows: "The enemy armies of the Southwestern Front were so badly battered that they were no longer capable of an offensive. The onslaught of the enemy units advancing on the left flank of the 1st Panzer Army and end-to-end between it and the Kempf group was especially weakened: the 6th army of the enemy, the group of M. M. Popov, operating at Grishino, and the 1st Guards Army. It could be assumed that we destroyed the 25th Tank Corps three rifle divisions, defeated the 3rd Tank Corps and the 4th Guards. TK, 10th TK, one separate tank brigade, one mechanized brigade, one rifle division and one ski brigade. Significant losses were suffered by the 1st Guards. shopping mall and 18th shopping mall, 6 rifle divisions and 2 ski brigades.

According to the reports of our troops, the enemy lost 23,000 killed in this battle between the Donets and the Dnieper. We captured 615 tanks, 354 guns, 69 anti-aircraft guns and a large number of machine guns and mortars. There were few prisoners - 9000. This is explained by the fact that our troops, mainly tank divisions, were not able to create a dense ring around the enemy. The cold forced - especially at night - to be located in and around settlements, so that there was enough space for enemy soldiers and their units who had abandoned their vehicles to get out of the encirclement. But we were not able to cut the Donets behind enemy lines, as the river was still ice-bound and soldiers with light weapons easily crossed it.

In addition to the indicated formations of the enemy, we destroyed the Mius 4th Guards surrounded abroad. mki 7th GV. KK".

Manstein, of course, achieved operational success, but such a modest number of prisoners clearly indicated that the victory won was far from revenge for Stalingrad.

And here is how Hausser remembered the counteroffensive: "On February 21, after a bridgehead was equipped at night,

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the attack was continued in an easterly direction, and around noon our troops approached Pavlograd. The 3rd SS Motorized Regiment "Deutschland" moved southwest of the city, where it destroyed a strong enemy in a three-day battle. Contact was established with the 15th Infantry Division. On the same day, the leadership of the troops on the front south of Samara was transferred to the headquarters of the 4th Panzer Army, Colonel-General Herman Goth, who, meanwhile, had already pulled up

additional forces from the east. On February 22, contact was made with the HEGUSCH Panzer Corps under General Otto von Knobelsdorff.

Although the strike of the division "Reich" from Krasnograd to the south managed to break the forward grouping of the Soviet "wedge" moving to the west, large enemy forces were still located to the east of the line of the recent attack. Additional forces were urgently needed to destroy this grouping and establish communication between the Leibstandarte and the Kempf army group northeast of Krasnograd. It was here that the "Dead Head" division of Obergruppenführer Theodor Eicke, which finally arrived at the front, entered the SS Panzer Corps, which was landed at Poltava and concentrated in the Pereshchepino area.

On February 22, the division set out to attack in a southeasterly direction between Samara and Orel and destroyed the stubbornly defending enemy. Meanwhile, the "Reich" division was deployed to the north and, advancing on Pavlograd, with the massive support of the bombers, overcame the crossing through Samara and took Webki. Here, on February 24, the forward detachments of both divisions joined up. To the north, the left-flank column of the "Totenkopf" division captured Orelka and thereby covered the open left flank ...

On February 20, warming came, the roads were freed from snow cover, which increased the mobility of motorized units. The first day of the offensive of the entire 4th Panzer Army in the northern direction led to a powerful breakthrough and the attacking units reached the Lozovaya hill. The attacking divisions broke through with shock wedges with strong flank cover along bypass roads.

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din... In the afternoon, the shock group of the "Reich" division broke through to the southern outskirts of Lozova, and the right column - to Wessel.

To the west, the "Dead Head" division was advancing, which included a reinforced tank regiment. Other units moved in east and northeast directions. At the same time, the left flank was still under the threat of the Soviet troops located there. After receiving radio intelligence data, the Soviet command gave the order to retreat, concentrating troops in the Lozovaya area, where they made their way in small groups, reinforced by tanks. Other enemy units over the next few days retreated from the area south of Pavlograd to the north. On February 28, one of these formations attacked the headquarters of the corps in Yuryevka, the other - the headquarters of the 15th Infantry Division in Orelka. The blow was strong, and drastic measures had to be taken. There were still large enemy forces between the forward detachments of the Totenkopf Division. A particularly strong defensive position of the enemy was created by the enemy in the area of Lozovaya.

The task of the SS Panzer Corps was, firstly, to destroy this stronghold of the enemy and, secondly, to eliminate the threat from the rear and flank of the Totenkopf Division. The first task was set on February 26 for the Reich division, the second for the Totenkopf division and the 15th Infantry Division. The last two divisions had to enter the battle already on February 25th. Their neighbor on the right, the KhSU Shtankovy Korpus, was supposed to cut off the strategically important road to Izyum with a swift blow to the north in order to prevent the approach of new Soviet units. However, the enemy forces at Lozova were already so great that it required the use of the entire Reich division. Golko On February 27, the front was broken through and the corps reached the area of the Lozo highway: Vaya - Orelka. The pursuit organized on February 28 allowed parts of the corps to break through far to the north. The first task was completed, Popov's strike group was defeated.

These days, the division "Dead Head" suffered a heavy loss. The plane of her commander Eike "Fusiler-Storch" at

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On a reconnaissance flight, he was shot down, and Eike died (this happened on February 26 near the village of Artel. Eicke, by the way, was one of the organizers of the concentration camp system in Germany. Sepp Dietrich also attributed the murder of the head of the attack aircraft, Ernst Röhm, to him. - B. WITH.). He was the soul of the division!

Meanwhile, the Leibstandarte had fulfilled its task. With constant attacks on various sectors of the front, its units stretched the Soviet forces and, thanks to this, stopped the enemy attack on Poltava.

Beginning on February 28, a regrouping of enemy forces was noted in front of the right flank of the division. From the area southwest of Kharkov, two tank corps and three rifle divisions of the 3rd Soviet tank army were deployed against the SS tank corps. A new phase of our offensive has begun. Now the direction of the blow was turned to the northwest. The target of the attack was the heights near Bereka and Efremovka, an area well known to us from the February battles.

The 4th Panzer Army sought to reach the Donets with its right flank, while the SS corps had to restore contact with the right flank of the Kempf army group, where the Leibstandarte was located. The offensive was continued on 1 and 2 March. As a result of these battles, it became clear that the newly brought up Soviet troops were introduced just between the advancing SS Panzer Corps and the line of defense of the Leibstandarte. They were attacked by the right flank of the Totenkopf Division. The enemy tried to avoid encirclement with the help of strong blows in the southeast and northeast direction. In vain! In three days of bloody battles near Efremovka, these troops were destroyed by the "Dead Head" division with the support of the "Reich" units and the Leibstandarte. Squadrons of attack aircraft supporting the attack successfully operated. Some Soviet units that managed to break out of the "boiler" for several days again threatened our units from the rear. They were destroyed. The commander of the Soviet 15th Guards Tank Corps was found dead not far from the command post of the SS Panzer Corps (Hausser made a slight mistake here).

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sya. The numbering of Soviet guards tank corps ended with 12. Here, of course, we are talking about Major General of Tank Forces, Hero of the Soviet Union Vasily Alekseevich Koptsov, who commanded the 5th Tank Corps of the 3rd Tank Army of the Voronezh Front. This corps became the 7th Guards Corps only on July 27, 1943. It is curious that Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, who was a cadet of this school, warmly wrote about the commander of the training tank battalion of the school of junior command personnel of the 11th mechanized corps in the Trans-Baikal village of Peschanka, captain Vasily Alekseevich Koptsov in his memoirs: I still remember this demanding commander and sincere person. I can't say that we became friends (he was a commander, I was a cadet), but the battalion commander treated me well, I also had respect for him. In the evenings we often talked about military service, about a possible war. Subsequently, Vasily Alekseevich Koptsov participated in the battles at Khalkhin Gol, received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, came to the Patriotic War as a general and died heroically at the front. This was the first regular officer I knew: they usually talk about such people - a military bone. By temperament, a man of few words, strong-willed, always smart, cheerful. He was for me both a mentor and an example of a real commander who devoted his life to educating Soviet soldiers who at any moment could defend our great Motherland." — RB. WITH.). On March 4, communication between our units was established. On March 5, the "Dead Head" division completed the destruction of the encircled enemy units and thus completed its most successful operation. The enemy suffered heavy losses in manpower and equipment. The area in the encirclement was overflowing with an incredible amount of abandoned weapons and equipment."

And here is how the comrade-in-arms of the deceased Koptsov, Lieutenant General Alexander Alexandrovich Vetrov, then a colonel, deputy commander of the 15th tank corps for the technical part, recalls the same battles: "K. dawn on February 28, the headquarters of the 15th tank corps and some of its units are concentrated

sharpened in Medvelovka. After agreeing on issues of interaction with the headquarters of the 111th Infantry Division, the brigades of the corps began the battle for the capture of Kegichevka. But as Lenin's Zavod and Par-Shlyakhova approached, they met stubborn resistance from the enemy, who halted their advance with tank counterattacks and massive air operations.

The regiments of the 219th Rifle Division of General V.P. Kotelnikov came to the rescue. With their help, we captured Leninsky Zavod and Par-Shlyakhova in the middle of the day. Moreover, the 88th tank and 52nd mechanized brigades, pursuing the retreating enemy units, also occupied Novo-Lvovka by evening.

But we were all alarmed by the appearance in this area of a large number of German tanks and the increasing activity of enemy aircraft. As if we, as they say, do not go too far ...

It got dark. Air raids have ceased. Taking advantage of this and the darkness, the 88th tank and 52nd mechanized brigades broke into Kegichevka on the move and captured the city. Having taken up all-round defense here, we carried out a thorough reconnaissance. And it turned out that the 15th Nazi infantry division with headquarters in Orelka, as well as some parts of the SS Panzer Division "Dead Head" were operating against us in this area. Forces, frankly speaking, are huge. And how do we manage to move forward?!

| On March 1943, units of our corps, together with regiments of the 111th and 219th rifle divisions, sought to develop the offensive further. And at first they were successful. Thus, the motorized riflemen of lieutenant colonel A. A. Golovachev drove the Nazis out of the territory of the state farm named after Chapaev, and the tankers of the 88th brigade of lieutenant colonel I. I. Sergeev repulsed a strong enemy counterattack.

But on the same day, we learned that the brigades of the neighboring 2nd Tank Corps and units of the 184th Rifle Division with great difficulty repel persistent enemy tank attacks from the rear. Atut and our reconnaissance discovered the advancing of enemy tank columns to the Par Shlyakho line

Vaya, Pavlovka, Kalyuzhnoye. General V. A. Koptsov had to urgently stop the advance to the west and turn the 195th tank brigade with the front to the east.

And on time! For up to twenty German T-GU tanks immediately hit this brigade. A fierce battle ensued, as a result of which the Nazis, having lost several tanks, were stopped. But our 195th brigade also lost three of the seven vehicles it had.

The increased activity of the enemy made it possible to judge that the combat initiative was gradually passing to him. And the moment is not far off when the Nazis will go over to a decisive counteroffensive against our weakened ones; far detached from the supply bases of the brigades.

Alarming reports coming from the rear also confirmed our fears. The Nazis had already begun to surround the building.

Having soberly assessed the unfavorable situation, General V. A. Koptsov reluctantly asked the Military Council of the 3rd Panzer Army for permission to leave the still unclosed encirclement. But I didn't get an answer right away. And only on the evening of March 2 did an order come from Merefi, where the army headquarters was located, from which it was clear that we, in essence, were already surrounded by the enemy. Further, it was said that a group of troops of the 3rd Tank Army was being created as part of the 12th and 15th Tank Corps, the 111th, 184th and 219th Rifle Divisions, united under the general command of the commander of the 12th Tank Corps, General M. And Zenkovich.

On the same evening, General V. A. Koptsov and the chief of staff of the corps, Lieutenant Colonel A. B. Lozovsky, were invited to Yeremeevka for a meeting with General M. I. Zenkovich (meets

and another spelling of the name of this general - Zinkovich, which, it seems, was the passport name of Mitrofan Ivanovich, mortally wounded on September 24, 1943 while crossing the Dnieper and posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. - B.S.). Upon their return, they brought to our attention that the commander of the group, General M. I. Zenkovich, outlined the following order of separation from the enemy:

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The rifle division of Colonel I. G. Ziberov was to break through in the direction of Leninsky Zavod, the eastern outskirts of Paraskaveya and further to Okhochey. The 12th Tank Corps and the 184th Rifle Division of Colonel S. D. Koida were to follow in parallel with us to Lozovaya and further through Melekhovka to Brovki. The 219th Infantry Division of General V.P. Kotelnikov was left in the rearguard to cover the rear and the entire battle order of the group.

But parts of our corps, as well as the regiments of the 111th and 219th rifle divisions at that time were in the closest contact with the enemy troops. Therefore, turning them by 180 degrees and retracting them presented an extreme difficulty. It was planned to withdraw first units of the 111th Rifle Division, then our 15th Tank Corps, and finally, from two in the morning on March 3, the regiments of the 219th Rifle Division.

Moreover, the latter were supposed to let through themselves at Antonovka the artillery, rear without shells, and only then follow them.

By this time, we again had only 9 tanks left in the corps with a negligible supply of fuel and five to seven shells for each. The entire motorized infantry of the corps consisted of 120-130 riflemen armed mainly with captured weapons. Motor transport consisted of 72 motor vehicles, in the gas tanks of which there was fuel for 20-30 kilometers. It was decided to organize all this in two columns, following to the north along parallel routes...

At dawn, both columns moved from the Leninsky Zavod area to the north. The column, led by V. A. Koptsov, followed the highway in the direction of the state farm "Ulyanovka" and further to Okhochey. To the left, along the muddy snow-clay road with ruts, the second one, mine, was slowly moving, pushing ahead of itself a small reconnaissance group and head guards consisting of an armored car and a squad of submachine gunners on a truck.

The weather was inhospitable and overcast. The snow that had fallen the day before lightly covered the road. But under it, covered with thin ice, there were puddles, puddles and puddles...

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Stooping under the weight of weapons and camping equipment, tired arrows go. Overtaking the infantry, sledges with seriously wounded men glided, cars with property hummed with a strained engine, towing behind them guns without shells, empty tank trucks...

At the second hour of the movement, when I was already thinking about declaring a halt, a growing aircraft roar was heard in the sky. And now an ugly "frame" was circling above us. Naturally, this did not bode well, since you can't hide our kilometer-long column here, in a treeless region, and the scout will not fail to point his aviators at us or tankers.

In order to avoid a premature meeting with the enemy, I sent the head of the column around the village that I met on the way. However, when our reconnaissance group tried to quietly approach its outlying houses in order to find out the situation, machine-gun fire was opened on it. We took even more to the left and moved already on the virgin lands.

But less than half an hour later, a firefight flared up ahead. I stopped the column, waiting for a report from the scouts on the forces of the enemy they encountered. And then shells rained down on the middle of the column.

A fire immediately broke out in two cars, other cars began to hastily turn around in the opposite direction.

With great difficulty, I nevertheless managed to restore order in the column and take measures to repel the attack of a small group of enemy tanks. However, after destroying our armored car and the truck on which the submachine gunners were driving, they pressed on. Seeing that we would not be able to hold out for long under the fire of tank guns, I gave the order to turn the column in the opposite direction and follow to connect with the column of the corps commander, under the protection of its tanks and infantry ...

And yet we broke away from the Nazis, who were cautious and did not dare to pursue us. And about an hour later they connected with the first column.

Having found General Koptsov, I reported to him what had happened. The corps commander was clearly disturbed by my report about the appearance of enemy tanks from the north, where, according to all reports,

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The wife of General Zenkovich's 12th Tank Corps was to operate. Then he offered to join his column.

Having given the necessary orders to return the vehicles of my convoy to the units to which they belonged before, I drove on together with V. A. Koptsov. Vasily Alekseevich was, as always, collected and cheerful.

When I asked if the general situation had cleared up, Koptsov answered in the negative.

"Until now, there is no connection either with the army headquarters or with General Zenkovich," he said worriedly. He.

About eleven o'clock, somewhere to the left of us, biting shots were heard, and in front, near the highway itself, shells began to burst.

- German tanks! - screams of alarm erupted. People poured out of the cars, took cover in a roadside ditch, putting the barrels of rifles and machine guns in the direction of the shots.

From everything it was felt that this time we could not avoid a serious battle.

General V. A. Koptsov immediately organized a circular defense. His voice, when he gave orders, was firm, and the orders themselves were concise, clear and thoughtful.

Through binoculars, I saw a column of enemy tanks of 15-20 vehicles a kilometer away from us. Yes, against such a number it will not be so easy for us to resist ...

In the meantime, our few "thirty-four" anti-tank guns opened fire on the enemy. An artillery duel ensued. But, of course, it could not last long: as already mentioned, we had very few shells.

The earth trembled from frequent explosions, the snow melted. Shards scattered thickly. Suddenly, General V. A. Koptsov groaned and sank to the ground. I rushed to him. But at the same moment, a piercing pain burned my left shin...

Submachine gunners from the commandant's section and the corps commander's orderly Nikolai Yudin ran up. Having put the general on a short fur coat, they carried him out of the funnels, into the shelter.

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— Vetrov! Stay with me and hold on! were Koptsov's last words. He lost consciousness.

Without bandaging even the wounds, I continued the work begun by the commander. Leaning on a piece of stick, he moved from gun to gun, from tank to tank. The blood filling the boot was unpleasantly squelching, but I was not up to it. It was necessary to adjust the fire. |

The enemy tanks tried several times to attack us, but the organized and courageous actions of our gunners, who fired albeit rarely, but with great accuracy, did not allow the enemy to approach. True, our losses in people and especially in motor vehicles grew, but three smoky columns of flame arose among the Nazis, after which the enemy became less impudent.

By evening, I was hurt again. The orderlies who arrived in time carried me to the headquarters bus, where the captain of the medical service, D. G. Shinkarenko, washed the wounds with alcohol. And because, as her pretty face suddenly became preoccupied, I realized that my affairs were unimportant. And the doctor confirmed This.

"You have a twenty-centimeter lacerated wound on the right side of the chest with a fracture of three ribs, as well as a blind wound on the left shin," she said. "Ah, I don't have anti-tetanus serum and even anesthesin. Everything burned down in the ambulance bus..."

After assuring the frustrated doctor that nothing would happen to me even without an injection, I inquired about the health of General V. A. Koptsov.

"Vasily Alekseevich is lying in a nearby car, he has a through wound in his right leg and a large loss of blood," answered Darya Grigoryevna.

After the doctor left, the adjutant of the corps commander, Senior Lieutenant Vladimir Revushkin, entered the car. Reported:

"We are still surrounded. But as soon as it gets dark, we will leave the highway and we will make our way to the north.

Well, the decision is correct. That's just to hold out until the evening.

And we held out. And as soon as it got dark, forward along

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there were two "thirty-fours" with machine guns on the armor. A car carrying General V. A. Koptsov moved behind them. The staff bus in which I was lying slowly followed her. More motor vehicles went further, and the third column, the last one left, "thirty-four", closed the column.

Soon the bus ran out of gas. He was attached with a cable to the trailing tank, but soon the cable broke, and the tankers did not notice it. Vetrov and his companions had to wander for a long time through the territory occupied by the Germans before they managed to cross the front line. Only at the beginning of May Alexander Alexandrovich left the hospital. In the sanatorium, he met with the chief of staff of the corps A. B. Lozovsky, who said that the commander died on the night of the breakthrough, that is, on the night of March 4-5, 1943. Vasily Alekseevich Koptsov never found out that he had found death just 300 meters from Hausser's command post in Krasnoe.

Vetrov's memoirs show that no one led the breakthrough of the encircled group, each of the formations went out alone, without coordinating their actions with their neighbors. Which is not surprising: the radio stations of all the encircled tank corps and rifle divisions were destroyed by artillery fire and enemy air raids even before the breakthrough began. Therefore, Koppov's corps could not receive any instructions from General Zinkovich, who formally led the group of encircled formations of the 3rd Panzer Army. That's when the Germans broke through from the Korsun-Shevchenkovsky "cauldron", as we will see later, they still managed to maintain control of the group until the very end, although they were in a much denser "cauldron" and much longer than the formations of the 3rd Panzer Army in March 1943.

The German generals, in the conditions of encirclement, still managed their troops better than the Soviet ones. And even then, to leave Zinkovich's group surrounded, there was no question. Neither the generals who fell into the "cauldron", nor the command of the Southwestern Front, nor the Headquarters thought about this. They perfectly understood that in the conditions of a small number of radio stations in the Soviet tank corps, the generals in the environment would quickly lose control of the war.

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Weak Soviet transport aviation and the dominance of the Luftwaffe in the air will not allow supplying those surrounded in anticipation of a deblocking counterattack.

The divisions of the Hausser corps, which played the main role both in carrying out counterattacks and in defending the most important positions, maneuvered much faster and more intelligently than the Soviet troops in the conditions of the layer cake that had developed on the southern wing of the Soviet German front. |

By the way, the structure of the Soviet tank forces in the form in which it had developed by the beginning of 1943,

- contributed to faster career growth of the senior command staff. Soviet tank troops consisted of tank brigades, tank corps and tank armies. The brigade commander is a colonel's position, it was usually commanded by colonels and lieutenant colonels, less often by majors. The post of commander of a corps was in the fork of major general - lieutenant general, i.e., already fully corresponded to the position of commander of a rifle corps. In the same way, the tank army was fully consistent with the official category of the general army. At the end of the war, both of them were commanded by colonel-generals or even marshals of the armored forces (P.S. Rybalko, S.I. Bogdanov). Thus, tank commanders jumped over the level of division commander necessary for general military commanders, which simply did not exist in tank troops. But the risk of death for a tank general was on average higher than for a general. In order to effectively lead a tank corps, its commander had to be directly in the battle formations, and not observe the battle from a camouflaged OP. Therefore, the risk of death among the commanders of Soviet tank corps, as well as among the commanders of German tank divisions, was higher than that of combined arms commanders.

On February 28, the order was given for the advance of German troops on Kharkov. His first goal was to defeat the Soviet 3rd Panzer Army in the Berestovaya area southwest of Kharkov. Manstein stated: "This goal was achieved

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4th Panzer Army by March 5th. The 12th and 4th Tank Corps, one cavalry corps and three rifle divisions of the enemy's 3rd Panzer Army were partially defeated, some of their personnel were taken prisoner in a small "cauldron" near Krasnograd. . There were again relatively few prisoners, while the enemy lost about 12,000 people killed; we captured 61| tank, 225 guns and 600 vehicles.

However, in the future, it was not possible to encircle large Soviet forces in the area of Kharkov itself. Manstein argued that the reason for this was the ice drift and thaw that began on the Donets. (Earlier, in exactly the same way, he claimed, as we remember, that the complete destruction of the encircled Soviet 6th and 3rd tank armies was prevented by the fact that the Donets was still covered with ice and the encircled infantrymen could cross over the ice.) As a result, the 4th Panzer Army was unable to cross the Donets below Kharkov and attack the Soviet troops from the east. I had to attack the Kharkov grouping in the flank. By the time the offensive of the 4th Panzer Army began on March 7, the Gotenkopf division had already fully arrived at the front and took part in it as part of the Hausser corps. Later, Kempf's group joined this offensive. Now the ice drift on the Donets made it difficult for Soviet reserves and reinforcements to approach the battlefield. However, Soviet troops were able to capture and hold a small bridgehead northwest of Izyum on the southern bank of the Donets. The 2nd Guards Tank Corps also managed to approach the Kharkov area.

As Manstein wrote, "we wanted to push the enemy south from Kharkov, against the Kempf group, or cut him off from crossings across the Donets east of Kharkov. If we succeeded, then we could take Kharkov by storm. The group, under all circumstances, intended to avoid a repetition of the fighting near Stalingrad, where the attacks of our forces bogged down on the outskirts of the city.

But it was inevitable that the word "Kharkov" magically attracted the soldiers and the middle level of the army leadership. The SS Panzer Corps wanted to present the newly conquered capital of Ukraine to "their Führer" as a sign of victory and made their way to him by the shortest route. It took a sharp

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intervention of the command of the group in order to achieve the refusal of the command of the corps from the intention to attack Kharkov frontally, otherwise it would be stuck here and this would enable the enemy units operating to the west of the city to avoid encirclement. Finally, it was possible to send the SS Panzer Corps around Kharkov from the east. The city fell without much fighting, and we managed to cut off the retreat through the Donets of large enemy forces.

In fact, this time the commander of the SS corps did not violate any orders. Initially, Hausser, in accordance with the order of the 4th Panzer Army of Hermann Hoth, sent units of two divisions, the Leibstandarte and Reich, to storm Kharkov. Later, when it became clear that it would not be possible to capture the city from a raid and heavy street fighting ensued, Hausser, again on the orders of the headquarters of the army group, withdrew units of the Reich from the city, which, in turn, replaced the "Gotenkopf", directed around Kharkov.

Hausser described the operation to take Kharkov in his memoirs as follows: "The condition of the roads worsened again. The snow was still deep here, and this made it difficult to move around (here Hausser is not a crooked soul. In the south, some time it snowed, but the roads had not yet cleared up. To the north, near Kharkov, the snow cover had not yet freed the roads, which made it difficult for the movement of motorized units. — BR. S.). Where should the next offensive be directed? Should it be aimed at the re-capture of Kharkov or at destruction. enemy forces in front of Army Group Kempf? The decision has not yet been made (we are talking about the day of March 5, when the "cauldron" was cleared to the south-west of Kharkov. - BR. S.). First it was necessary to reach the Mzhi region. On March 6, the offensive was continued... On March 7, it got warmer. During the night frosts, the ground no longer froze. The roads were sometimes covered with snow, sometimes buried in mud. People and technology were at the limit of their capabilities.

The Russians have a weak point. The battle between the Donets and the Dnieper cost them heavy losses. They sent new troops to help, which, however, turned out to be insufficient... With the capture of Valok on March 7, the direction of the main

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ra shifted to the western flank. For several days, large enemy forces were held by the KHEMUSH tank corps near Taranovka. It was not possible to take Merefa. On March 8, the Leibstandarte advanced through the railway junction to the north of Valki, its forward detachments reached the western outskirts of Kharkov.

The reconnaissance detachments of the "Dead Head" division deployed on the left reached Olshan. The Reich's advance was delayed by the conditions of the terrain and the strong threat to the flanks from the east. On March 9, the Uda region was reached and Olshany was taken. The troops of the Kempf army group on the left also moved forward. The next target could only be Kharkov. The SS Panzer Corps decided to launch an attack on 10 March. The city was to be attacked simultaneously from the north and north-east by parts of the Leibstandarte, from the west - by "Reich", each attack - in three directions. The Totenkopf Division was given the task of covering the Kempf army group in the northwestern and northern directions from both the former and recently brought up Soviet troops.

On March 10, continuing the offensive, the Leibstandarte and the "Dead Head" bypassed Kharkov from the north and cut off the city. The Leibstandarte and "Reich" created a good springboard for themselves to break into the city, however, due to increased resistance on the outskirts of the city, they were able to advance only after the concentration of all forces. The attack was delayed until March 1st.

On the evening of March 10, the SS Panzer Corps was ready for the assault: "Reich" - on the western outskirts of the city, a covering group with a front to the southeast, against the enemy acting against a neighbor on the right; the Leibstandarte, divided into three strike groups, on the northern outskirts of the city; Dead Head provides cover in the northwest, from Dergachi to Olshan. The third battle for Kharkov began. The enemy managed to organize the defense of the city using improvised means. Barricades blocking the advance of troops and equipment were scattered throughout the city. The banks of the river were also strong defensive positions.

|| March, the Leibstandarte unexpectedly burst into the city. In fierce street fighting, he broke through to Red Square

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busier. The streets leading northeast were within the reach of our heavy guns.

On the night of March 12, "Reich" overcame the anti-tank position in the west and opened the way to the city. The division reached the main station. The enemy carried out distracting attacks from the northeast against the "Dead Head" division, the front of which stretched to the river.

Meanwhile, strong enemy units firmly held the positions of the counter units of the KhGUShtankovy corps south and southeast of Kharkov, despite the threat of encirclement from the SS Panzer Corps. There was an opportunity to surround and destroy the enemy with a blow through Rogan. But this could only be done with the opening of a through road through Kharkov. The order of the headquarters of the 4th Panzer Army to immediately withdraw units of the "Reich" from street fighting and to throw it around Kharkov from the north meant a serious delay. Therefore, units of the "Totenkopf" were used to attack Chuguev in order to block the main road to the southeast here, while the headquarters of the corps insisted that it was necessary to first take control of the through road through the city. After communication between the Leibstandarte and Reich was established on the evening of March 12, the battle group of Standartenfuehrer Heinz Harmel, the basis of which was the motorized regiment Deutschland (from the Reich division. - B.S.), was sent forced march to Rogan to cut off enemy supply routes here.

After the withdrawal of these parts of the Reich, the main burden of the fighting in the city fell on the Leibstandarte. The division recaptured street after street from the enemy until on March 14, at 6 pm, a message was received that the southern part of Kharkov had also been captured. The factory area to the east was also cleared.

Meanwhile, the roads, with the exception of paved ones, were already practically impassable. Parts of the Totenkopf Division and the Harmel battle group were without fuel on March 14, because the supply columns got stuck on the way. They had to wait for supplies by air, and therefore it was difficult to achieve their goals.

On the morning of March 15, the Harmel battle group made its way to the

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on the railway south of Rogan, and after successful tank battles the "Dead Head" reached the crossing at Chuguev and blocked it. During the following days, the defensive line had to be defended from powerful attempts to break through and from attacks from the east. The main forces of the encircled enemy, and above all his equipment, managed to be destroyed or captured ...

A significant number of Soviet formations were destroyed, others suffered heavy losses. This was the last victory of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front! In the following days during

the pursuit of the enemy to the east and north of the corps reached the banks of the Donets, and on March 18, as the completion of a successful operation, Belgorod was taken after a short battle. There, contact was established with the division "Grossdeutschland" advancing from the west, which in recent days in fierce battles destroyed a large amount of enemy manpower and equipment (according to the report of the division, in the battles for the capture of Kharkov, it destroyed 269 Soviet tanks, heads in some way from the 2nd and 3rd Guards Tank Corps. - K. S.).

The total losses of the SS corps during the third battle for Kharkov amounted to 365 officers and 11,154 non-commissioned officers and soldiers.

On March 4, the Leibstandarte and the Dead Head attacked along the Krasnograd-Merefa-Kharkov highway. "Reich", meanwhile, tried to bypass Kharkov from the east and entered into battle with the 25th Guards Rifle Division and the 179th Separate Tank Brigade near Taranovka.

In accordance with the plan for the attack on Kharkov, on March 5, the Reich division turned north, with the Deutschland regiment on the right flank and the Fuhrer regiment on the left. By 6 p.m., the Fuhrer Regiment had reached a height of 185.5 m north of Okhochey and the southern outskirts of Novoselovka. The Leibstandarte, meanwhile, took Vinniki.

The first target of the corps is Novaya Vodolaga and the southern bank of the Mzha between Bakhmetyevka and Valki. On the left flank, the Leibstandarte had to move faster than the other divisions of the corps in order to push back to the west the Soviet units still to the southeast and south of Va

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lok. Behind him moved "Dead Head", and on the right flank - "Reich". But there were very few tanks left in service. "Reich" had only 1] tanks, the Leibstandarte had 51 vehicles, and the "Gotenkopf" - 58. Hausser addressed the operational headquarters with an alarming telegram: "Immediate reinforcements of 50 T-! U tanks for the Reich division, sent - by express transport through Poltava in the direction of Krasnograd, is decisive for the continuation of the operation. Information about the tanks available to the corps was transferred to the High Command of the Ground Forces. However, before the end of the battle for Kharkov, the requested vehicles did not have time to arrive.

On March 5, the SS Panzer Corps entered the battle with units of the Soviet 3rd Panzer Army, which was trying to counterattack, and surrounded part of its forces. Separate groups of soldiers left the encirclement towards the Donets until April.

On March 6, without waiting for reinforcements, the SS Panzer Corps went on the offensive from the Okhochee-Krutaya Balka line in the direction of Mzhi. The mudslide caused by the thaw makes itself felt. HEUSCH Panzer Corps, advancing to the right of the SS Panzer Corps, advances very slowly and falls behind the Reich. To cover the gap, the motorcycle-rifle battalion of the division was sent through Karavanskoye to Somnalkov and by the evening occupied this village.

The Leibstandarte quickly reached Mzhi, pursuing the retreating Soviet units. With the help of one of its battalions, the division created a bridgehead on the northern bank of the river near the village of Bridki. The Leibstandarte then advanced further to the northwest and approached Valki.

In the meantime, with the support of the 5th tank company, dive bombers and several anti-aircraft guns, the Deutschland regiment occupied Novaya Vodolaga, destroying 4 T-34 tanks and completely capturing this regional center by the morning of the next day. |

On the night of March 7, the Fuhrer Regiment also reached Mzhi without encountering serious resistance. Soviet bombers unsuccessfully tried to destroy the bridge in Novaya Vodolaga.

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On March 7, the 6th company of the "Deutschland" regiment and the 5th company of the tank regiment of the "Reich" division, supported by a platoon of anti-aircraft guns, carried out reconnaissance in the direction of Karlovka, where they met strong resistance from the Soviet troops, who had anti-tank guns, mortars and Katyushas. . The 2nd Battalion of the Deutschland Regiment reached Pavlovka. The 3rd Battalion of the Fuhrer Regiment, supported by assault guns and self-propelled anti-tank guns, managed to advance to the northeast and finally establish contact with the 11th Panzer Division of the KhGUShtankovy corps. In the afternoon, this battalion went to the Merefa area to the north of. Caravan. At 3 p.m., the battalion commander, Hauptsturmführer Kaiser, received a message from a reconnaissance aircraft that the Soviet troops were leaving Korotych and retreating to the southwestern outskirts of Kharkov. Then the battalion resumes the attack in order to capture an important crossroads north of Korotych. Untersturmführer Schmager, platoon commander of the 9th Panzer-Grenadier Company of the Fuhrer Regiment, recalled: "Grumbling and rumbling, the armored personnel carriers move off. In the twilight, which now comes quickly, the forward platoon starts moving at a good speed. "Faster! Prepare machine guns and grenades! Attention right and left." These are the orders given to the small crew of "tin cans" with weak armor. The lead armored personnel carrier rushes forward in one jerk, so that the people sitting inside fall on top of each other. Behind him, keeping a distance, three other armored personnel carriers of the 4th Platoon follow, followed by "tank hunters" (self-propelled anti-tank guns) at a greater distance, and then again by armored personnel carriers and assault guns. The road is good and in relatively good

condition.

With the appearance of the first houses, an order is given on the radio to the vehicles following behind: "Slow down and group yours." Radio message to the commander of the 9th company of the Der Fuhrer regiment: "The lead vehicle has reached the outskirts of Korotych. We continue to move towards the prescribed goal of the attack. Then the crackling voice of the company commander is heard in the headphones: "Move carefully, be extremely vigilant!

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I'm joining you!" Four armored personnel carriers drive forward at walking speed, controlling the terrain. Not a sound comes from the houses. Only muffled rumbles of artillery fire, sounding in the distance, and machine-gun bursts are heard. The darkness is complete, and, leaning forward, four people and their platoon commander are trying to penetrate the view through this darkness. The Untersturmführer swears: "Damn shit! And he adds to the driver: "Stop, turn off the engine." Can't see the car behind. Raising their fur hats and steel helmets, the five people are peering intently at the area. "Untersturmführer, right in front of us I hear voices and the noise of one engine," radio operator Schmidt whispers to the platoon commander. "Forward, let's go! - a report is sent to the company again. The driver is given the order: "Hey, Virgs, a little faster!" Suddenly, the radio operator shouts to his platoon leader: "They are there!" — and their machine gun begins to chirp. Now a real fiery hurricane flies out of our machine guns. As if set on fire by a torch, a Russian truck lights up and illuminates a large intersection. We are on target! There swarming and fussy running around, as in a torn anthill, screams, and machine guns are gathering a big harvest. "Shoot at anyone who runs away! Virgs - to the right! Moltz, radio report ro..." But just at that moment an explosion was heard in the armored personnel carrier. The platoon leader falls and the driver, Unterscharführer Wirgs, screams. Then - a dull blow next to the armored personnel carrier, which is knocked out, other machine guns chirp, and, throwing grenades in front of them, the grenadiers quickly slip to the platoon commander's damaged car and protect it.

In these memoirs, the wide and effective use of radio communications on the march and in battle, as well as the operational use of the results of aerial reconnaissance, is striking.

At dawn on March 8, the SS men occupied the road junction north of Korotych and cut the Lyubotin-Kharkov railway line. After that, the Fuhrer Regiment turned east.

On March 7, the division of the Leibstandarte expanded the Bredok bridgehead. His 1st Panzergrenadier Regiment captured Val-

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ki, which ensured the flank of the Reich division during the advance and the advance of the Fuhrer regiment in the direction of Merefa and Lyubotin. After successfully capturing Valki, the Leibstandarte continues its rapid advance on the western wing of the SS Panzer Corps.

On March 8, after capturing a crossroads located north of Korotych, the Deutschland regiment crossed Mzhuv Pavlovki, and the Fuhrer regiment crossed Bakhmetyevka. On the right flank of the Reich division, the Deutschland regiment is forced to fend off the threat from the Soviet forces operating east of the Rakitnoye-Lyubotin area.

On that day, the commander of the Reich division, Oberführer Fall, reported to the headquarters of the tank corps that "the technical condition, especially of tracked vehicles, is catastrophic. Further combat operations will depend on the remaining materiel. Continuing the movement without a technical break of 4-5 days will leave no reserves for the spring, the trucks have already covered 1,000 kilometers in excess of the usual oil change. Natanka needs to put on summer caterpillars. In addition to all the misfortunes, the partisans attacked the supply columns of the SS Panzer Corps near Orel.

\$ March, the Leibstandarte took old Lyubotin and sent reconnaissance in the direction of Kharkov, to the area of Guka and Pererechnaya. The fighters of the Leibstandarte destroyed 3 T-34 tanks and 30 artillery pieces.

HEUSCH Panzer Corps of General von Knobelsdorff on the southern approaches to Kharkov collided with the 25th Guards Rifle Division of General Sheferenko, which delayed his advance for five days. However, the SS Panzer Corps hangs over the grouping defending Kharkov from the west. General Goth orders Hausser to bypass Kharkov.

March 9 "Reich" was transferred to the western outskirts of Kharkov. On that day, the 6th Panzer Division drove the Soviet troops out of Taranovka. And at the same time, the Soviet 6th Army tried to launch a counterattack from the Zmiev area against the SS flank tank corps, but collided with the 11th Panzer Division of the HEUP Panzer Corps. On this day, after the capture of Valki by the Germans, the 69th Army began to withdraw. From the front, the 320th pressed on her

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infantry division, and the 167th infantry division was advancing end to end between the 69th and 40th armies. To counter this threat, the 107th, 183rd, and 340th rifle divisions were reassigned from the 40th Army to the 69th Army, which were to strike in the direction of Bogodukhov-Oly'shany. But it was already too late.

On March 9, the 2nd Motorized Regiment of the Leibstandarte under the command of Standartenführer Theodor Wisch attacked Lyubotin from the west. At the same time, the Fuhrer Regiment continued its offensive northward. All morning the soldiers had to clear the snow-covered road north of Bayrak and through the forest south of Lyubotin with shovels. The Fuhrer regiment attacked the eastern outskirts of Lyubotin, advancing its 2nd battalion from the south, and the 3rd battalion from the east and southeast. Fierce battles broke out in the city, the outcome of which was decided only after the 2nd Motorized Regiment of the Leibstandarte approached the northern outskirts of Lyubotin. In the evening, the German vanguards are already entering Pererechnaya and Polevoye to continue their advance on Dergachi and Russian Lozovaya to the north and northeast of Kharkov.

Meanwhile, the Soviet troops launched a counterattack and recaptured Korotych. The Fuhrer Regiment is forced to abandon its 2nd and 3rd battalions in order to drive the Russian 303rd Rifle Division out of Korotych. This can be done on the evening of March 9th. |

Meanwhile, the Deutschland regiment reached Kharkov north of the Poltava-Kharkov road, and then, turning towards the city, occupied the village of Solonitseвка. The division "Gotenkopf" took Olypany.

On the evening of March 9, Hausser gave the order to take Kharkov. The Leibstandarte was to attack the city from the north and northeast, and the Reich from the west. The Totenkopf division was supposed to cover the offensive from the northwest and from the north.

At 19:20 on March 9, the command of the 4th Panzer Army issued an order, which arrived at the headquarters of the SS Panzer Corps at 20:43. The order read:

"Tasks:

— HEUSCH tank corps: with the help of the 11th tank division, the corps controls the crossings over the Merefuu Mere

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fy, advances on the Merefa-Kharkov road to the northeast and hinders the enemy's advance south of Kharkov against the eastern flank of the SS Panzer Corps.

- SS Panzer Corps: having concentrated its forces, on March 10, it captures the area between Kharkov and Dergachi along the Lopan and tightly locks Kharkov from the west and from the north.

"We need to clarify the situation in the city. You should use the possibility of taking the city with one blow.

- The dividing line between the KHEUSH tank corps and the SS tank corps to Korotych, as before, Lipovaya Grove (HEUSH tank corps), Losevo (KhGUSH tank corps).

- Since the morning of March 10, the army headquarters has been located in Vavazovka, south of Lozovaya. Signature: Goth.

On March 10, the gap in the Soviet defense reached 60 km. The Germans came out from the south to Bogodukhov and captured it on March 11. By order of the command of the Voronezh Front, the 40th Army began to withdraw in order to avoid encirclement. Two of its three divisions transferred to the 69th Army were destroyed in the Bogodukhov area.

Both Goth and Hausser hoped that Kharkov could be taken in one attack without heavy street fighting. They believed that the main Soviet forces had already been crushed on the outskirts of the city. They also counted on the support of the 4th Air Fleet, which numbered 900 aircraft.

Kharkov was defended by the Soviet 3rd Panzer Army stationed in the city. The 69th Army defended the western approaches to the city, and the 40th Army defended the northern ones. The city is concentrated significant forces.

According to German estimates, the population of Kharkov, before the Soviet troops occupied the city in February 1943, numbered about 300,000 inhabitants. After the German troops reoccupied Kharkov in March, its population, again, according to the estimate of the German military commandant's office, decreased to 200,000 people. The German occupation authorities claimed that of the 100,000 inhabitants who disappeared from Kharkov during the month of Soviet power, about 10,000 people (10%) were evacuated by the Germans in February; the same, 10,000 live

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lei (10%), including a surprisingly large number of elderly people, were taken away by the Soviet troops; 4,000 residents (4%) were executed by Soviet troops, including young girls,

walking with German soldiers; 15,000 inhabitants, or 15% of the population between 15 and 45 years old, were immediately sent to the front in civilian clothes. They had one rifle for 5-10 people. To the remark that they had no experience, they were answered: "Pull the bolt to the left, then to the right, then shoot in the direction of the enemy and maybe you will hit something." 5,000 residents (5%) of the young girls were sent to the rear to be trained as signal auxiliaries; 35,000 residents (35%) left the city to seek better living conditions in the city; 21,000 residents (21%) were left to die during the fighting in the city.

It should be emphasized that, with the exception of the first figure, i.e. the number of Kharkovites evacuated by the Germans in February, all other figures are taken, as they say, from the ceiling and are used explicitly for propaganda purposes. Firstly, the number of Kharkovites executed for their association with the Germans looks clearly exaggerated. Girls and women who had an intimate relationship with the Germans were not subjected to the death penalty. Some of them, of course, could have been killed, having fallen under the hot hand of Soviet soldiers, but the number of dead could not have been in the thousands. Most of the collaborators chose to leave with the Germans. Kharkov remained a front-line city, and the NKVD did not manage to unleash mass repressions there in a month in February-March. There is no evidence of mass executions in Kharkov during this period. It can be assumed that several hundred people were shot, but not 4 thousand. The number of persons of non-military age evacuated from Kharkov to the interior of the USSR seems to be overestimated. Valuable specialists were evacuated back in 1941, and in March 1943, the Soviet command hoped to hold Kharkov to the last and did not announce evacuation. It is unlikely that 10 thousand people left with the Soviet troops, rather, 1-2 thousand. The number of people who moved to the countryside looks absolutely incredible.

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35 thousand people in Kharkiv. Everyone who could have already moved from hungry Kharkov to the villages during the German occupation. The number of civilians who died during the fighting in Kharkov seems to be just as overestimated. In February, there were no street fights in the city. The Germans left the city without a fight, and did not even take active actions against the rebellious Kharkov workers. The victims then could be several hundred, but not several thousand. In March, when the Soviet troops were leaving the city, there were street fights. But again, it is absolutely unbelievable that 21 thousand citizens died in them - a tenth of the entire population that remained by that time in Kharkov. Citizens in street battles could not have died more than Soviet soldiers. And in the entire Kharkov defensive operation on March 4-25, the troops of the Voronezh Front, according to official data, lost 29,807 Red Army soldiers dead or missing, of which only an insignificant part fell on the battles in Kharkov itself. Even assuming that the official Soviet figures on irretrievable losses are overestimated by a factor of three, more than 5,000 to 6,000 Red Army men could not have died in street fighting, and far fewer urban dwellers should have died. It is necessary to take into account that only the 86th and 179th tank brigades, the 17th NKVD brigade, the 253rd and 104th rifle brigades and the 62nd guards, 19th, 303rd and 350th rifle divisions fought in the city itself, moreover, they suffered the main losses in defensive battles on the outskirts of Kharkov and during the retreat from the city. The 62nd Guards Rifle Division, which was covering the retreat, was almost completely destroyed, and its commander, Major General G.M. Zaitsev died.

I estimate the total number of Kharkiv residents who died during the fighting in the city as a result of Soviet repressions, as well as persons of non-military age who left with the Red Army, I estimate at no more than 109 thousand people. To this we must add 10 thousand people who left with the Germans. The remaining 80,000 people (including, possibly, up to 5,000 women) are, most likely, those Kharkiv citizens who were mobilized into the Red Army, both centrally, through military enlistment offices, and directly in parts. After all, the same Voronezh Front only

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from mid-January to early March 1943, he received about 100,000 reinforcements that were not taken into account by official statistics. But this was even before the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Kharkov, when they probably tried to take with them as many conscripts as possible. Such a high percentage of men liable for military service among the population that remained in Kharkov by the time of its first liberation, up to 25%, does not seem unbelievable. It should be taken into account that Kharkov was an industrial city, and many workers, engineers and technicians had reservations and were not drafted into the Red Army in 1941. Now, however, reservations were hardly paid attention to, especially since many workers and engineers were forced to work for the Germans and therefore were considered not entirely trustworthy from the point of view of the Soviet government.

But back to the battle for Kharkov. On March 10, the Leibstandarte and Totenkopf divisions blocked the city from the north. Then the Leibstandarte and "Reich" were supposed to break into Kharkov, but they met with strong resistance. The Gotenkopf covered them from the north.

The Fuhrer regiment was to advance to the southern outskirts of Kharkov, cut the Merefa-Kharkov railway and highway and cover the right flank SS corps from east.

Hausser sought to encircle Kharkov and, above all, to cut off the defenders from reinforcements from the north.

At 10:30 p.m., the headquarters of the 4th Panzer Army transmitted by radio an operational order to the headquarters of the SS corps for March 11, 1943:

"1) The enemy seems to be leaving Kharkov.

2) The 4th Panzer Army takes Kharkov, surrounding it from the north and northeast.

3) Zalachi:

a) The KhGU III Panzer Corps, with the forces of the 6th Panzer Division, pursues the enemy retreating east of Taranovka, forces him out of the Mzhi area and locks up the Mzhi area between Zmiev and Sokolov. With the forces of the 11th Panzer Division, the corps continues the attack outside the Merefa region in order to block Kharkov from the south.

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6) The SS Panzer Corps takes Kharkov. The eastern wing advances to the Chuguev-Kharkov road and blocks it. As powerful as possible forces are concentrated northeast of Kharkov until they enter the city. In the west, it is enough to lock up the city. To cover from the north, one should reach the Dementievka-Zolochiv line and hold it."

On the evening of March 10, the SS broke into Kharkov.

The "Reich" division entered the western outskirts of the city as a battle group of the "Deutschland" (Harmel) regiment. As part of the regiment was his 2nd battalion. On the other hand, it was reinforced by the 3rd battalion of the Fuhrer regiment, the 1st company of the tank battalion of the Gotenkopf division, the 2nd tank battalion, the 2nd engineer battalion, the battery of assault guns, the 2nd artillery regiment com division (without the 1st division) and the 2nd anti-aircraft division of the Reich division. This assault group was covered from the southeast by the 2nd Battalion of the Deutschland Regiment, the 2nd Battalion of the Fuhrer Regiment and the heavy weapons units assigned to them. The strike groups intended to attack Kharkov concentrated in Solonitseвка and west of Kuryanka.

The Leibstandarte deployed one strike group in Alekseevka, a second at the northern exit from the city in the direction of Belgorod, and a third on the western outskirts of Bolshaya Danilovka.

In the north, Totenkopf held the line: the northern quarter of Dergachi, the Feska railway station, Novaya Kultura and the western outskirts of Olshan.

In the west and south-west of the city, Soviet troops managed to dig anti-tank ditches. Many streets were blocked off with barricades. For defense, both the rivers crossing Kharkov and the approaches to it were used.

On the night of March 10-11, the Reich division repulsed several attacks on the Kharkov-Olynany road. The Germans had to leave Kuryazhanka under the strong pressure of the Soviet troops, but they managed to recapture it at 6 o'clock in the morning, after a short battle. The Leibstandarte also repulsed several attacks using tanks. On the evening of March 10, the Gotenkopf division occupied Russian Lozovaya.

At 4 am 1 | March, the Leibstandarte began a methodical

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attack from the north. His western strike group got stuck at Alekseevka, having run into strong resistance. Bypassing Alekseevka from the west, the main part of the division cut the railway line at the Northern Post and reached the northwestern outskirts of Kharkov by 0750 hours. We had to move slowly, suppressing stubborn Soviet resistance. 7 T-34 tanks were destroyed. Attacking on the Belgorod road, the battle group of Max Hansen (2nd battalion of the 1st tank-grenadier regiment of the Leibstandarte) broke into the northern quarters of Kharkov along the Belgorod road.

At noon, the vanguard units of the Leibstandarte met with fierce resistance, and their advance slowed down. The SS men had to fight off the Soviet tank counterattacks, and by 12.30 they had already announced the destruction of 19 T-34 tanks. German artillery bombarded the roads leading to the city from the northeast to prevent the approach of Soviet reinforcements.

The "Reich" division began the assault on Kharkov at 8 o'clock in the morning, after it succeeded in driving the enemy out of Kuryazhanka for the second time. The Harmel battle group, part of the reinforced Deutschland Regiment, met with fierce resistance. The 1st battalion reached the Zalyutino station by 4 p.m. The right wing of the battle group was counterattacked from the Ryzhovo station. The counterattack was repelled with the help of anti-aircraft guns of the 3rd platoon of the 2nd SS anti-aircraft division, which were distinguished by a high rate of fire. At noon, the northern assault group of the SS Regiment "Deutschland" reached the edge of the forest southeast of Hill 160. Here the attack was stopped by fierce resistance from the Soviet troops, who had a significant amount of anti-tank weapons.

In the Bud region, the Kumma battle group, formed from the Fuhrer regiment, breaks through the Soviet defensive positions on the southern outskirts of Kharkov and in the afternoon, crossing the Uda River, cut the Kharkov-Merefa road. '

At 3 p.m., the headquarters of the 4th Panzer Army issued the following order to the SS Panzer Corps:

"The 4th Panzer Army is preventing any enemy retreat to

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east in front of the KhGUSH tank corps. To do this, the SS Panzer Corps, leaving several units to ensure security, transfers the Reich division from the western outskirts of Kharkov along the northern outskirts of Kharkov to the eastern flank of the corps. The corps should advance with the forces of this division east of Kharkov, delivering a blow to the south, on Zmiev, in the back of the enemy, located in front of the HEUSH tank corps, in order to make it impossible for the enemy to withdraw to Chuguev. Strong units of the Leibstandarte should operate through the eastern quarters or along the eastern outskirts of Kharkov, south to Bezlyudovka.

Thus, the original plans to take Kharkov from a raid with the forces of two SS divisions had to be abandoned due to the fierce resistance of the enemy. Indeed, for the Soviet side, the possession of Kharkov, to no lesser extent than for the Germans, was a matter of prestige. Now the division "Reich" was withdrawing from the city in order to ensure a detour maneuver in order to force the Soviet troops to leave Kharkov under the threat of encirclement.

The Leibstandarte, advancing towards Red Square, was stopped by the stubborn resistance of the enemy. Equally stubborn resistance was met by the Reich division. Therefore, Hausser feared that the withdrawal, provided only with weak cover, would entail heavy losses, given that the Soviet troops used the slightest opportunity for counterattacks.

He believed that the Soviet formations defending against the HEUSH tank corps could be surrounded and destroyed by a strike to the southeast, through the Rogan. But for this it is necessary to open a through road through Kharkov, since the movement of troops around the city is associated with a great loss of time and the risk that they will be subjected to enemy attacks on the march. The execution of the order of the command of the 4th Panzer Army, which ordered the immediate withdrawal of the Reich units, leading street battles, so that they would march along roads muddy with mud and lose at least a day, would lead, according to Hausser, to the fact that from Kharkov, significant Soviet forces will have time to leave to the east.

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Therefore, the corps commander ordered the Totenkopf division to advance on Chuguev in order to create a barrier there against Soviet counterattacks. Contrary to the order of the army headquarters, the SS Panzer Corps left the Reich division in Kharkov for the time being, before mastering the through road through the city.

Companies [of the 1st Battalion of the Regiment "Deutschland" were stopped on the eastern outskirts of Zalyutin, just 500 meters from Kharkov. In front of the very outskirts of the city, between two woods, there was a short but deep anti-tank ditch, which was defended by Soviet troops, who took up positions in the outskirts of houses. German tanks and assault guns approaching the moat were under aimed fire from anti-tank guns and 122-mm guns. Then Heinz Harmel decided to use the 16th sapper company of the Deutschland regiment under the command of Untersturmführer Heinz Maher to force the anti-tank ditch and break into Kharkov with shock groups and create a bridgehead there. |

The sappers went into action on the night of March 11-12. Here is how this battle is described in the marching journal of the 16th company: "One platoon of the 1st battalion of the Deutschland regiment and one platoon of the engineer battalion of the Reich division were placed at the disposal of the 16th engineer company of the Deutschland regiment... intelligence could establish that the Soviet forces are significant, that their forward lines are located in the first houses, on a sloping section of the terrain and in well-equipped positions. No movement is visible in the anti-tank ditch. On this side, on the lower edge of the anti-tank ditch, there is a dead corner. To maintain surprise, we forego deep reconnaissance. After the transfer of instructions to the strike group commander regarding the terrain and the establishment of a breakthrough site, at 2 hours 40 minutes in the morning, heavy gun fire from the II battalion of the Deutschland regiment falls on this area, and the advanced groups take their places. As soon as they pass the first 300 meters to the well, a heavy Soviet barrage suddenly begins. The anti-tank ditch was reached with one throw.

On the opposite side with the help of bayonets

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steps are dug out, and the attackers climb up them. Directly on the other side of the anti-tank ditch, 30 meters from the enemy positions, the command is heard: "Prepare for a breakthrough! Fortunately, the enemy fire is directed too high. Our own shots fall exactly on the area of the breakthrough.

At 02:53, the company, shouting "Hurrah," rushes forward, throwing bundles of grenades and firing light machine guns in the direction of the city. Having lined up at an angle, the shock groups [of the 6th company of the Deutschland Regiment] crossed the second and then the third row of houses. Then the group turns right and left again and covers the newly captured bridgehead, while the other group runs forward. Another group has been withdrawn to the anti-tank ditch and remains in the breakthrough area as a reserve for a counterattack.

Both attached platoons are ordered to reach the breakthrough site. At 3:15 pm the 1st platoon of the "Deutschland" regiment arrives - together with it, the bridgehead has increased in depth by 300 meters. With the arrival of a divisional sapper battalion platoon, the bridgehead expands by another 300 meters. At 03:40, all the nearest units of the [th battalion of the Deutschland Regiment were placed under the command of the commander of the 16th company, and he sent them to attack deep into the enemy positions, in the direction of the city center. The enemy is aware of the seriousness of the situation. We hardly beat off desperate counterattacks, mainly from the left flank.

At 4:15 the Eps group, the last reserve, is forced to fight on the left. The assault guns, under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Raeder, set out at 04:20 and move in the direction of the well above the anti-tank ditch.

At 4:15 am, the engineer platoon of the tank regiment of the Reich division begins to blow up and level the anti-tank ditch. At about 4 hours and 40 minutes, the bridgehead is under our complete control. Captured anti-tank guns are rotated 180 degrees and increase our firepower.

The attack towards the city center is developing. batch

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The commander of the regiment, Hauptsturmführer Dirks, who joined the 16th company, was wounded by a sniper on the right flank near the well.

At 4:45 the first units of the 3rd Panzer-Grenadier Battalion of the Führer Regiment under the command of Hauptsturmführer Kaiser arrive on foot, and they continue to fight their way into the city center. The snipers active on our right flank are forced to fall silent under the barrage of machine-gun fire and under the shots of our own snipers. Enemy assault aircraft attacks can be beaten off with the help of machine guns and rifles.

At 5:15 our first tanks crossed the leveled anti-tank ditch and burst into Kharkov. At about 5:25 the enemy retreats in front of the entire plandarme front, and the attack of the Deutschland regiment continues in the direction of the Kharkov station.

The 16th sapper company of the Deutschland regiment made a hole in the enemy position on the western outskirts of the city, which was decisive for the success of the offensive. At first, she stays with the assigned platoon of the engineer battalion of the Reich division as a cover in the captured positions.

The company suffered the following losses: 1 non-commissioned officer wounded, 5 privates wounded.

Enemy losses: 28 prisoners and 40 killed.

Trophies of the company on the bridgehead: 114 rifles, 13 machine guns, 15 light machine guns, [2 heavy machine guns, 8 heavy mortars, 5 anti-tank guns, 6 guns of 122 mm caliber, 4 light mortars. One Il-2 aircraft was shot down.

The Leibstandarte division was reinforced by the 4th heavy company of the SS Panzer Regiment Leibstandarte. This company of Hauptsturmführer Heinz Kling had 14 Tiger tanks, but on March 4, only 8 Tigers remained in service. In addition, there were 5 T-1U tanks. The Soviet KV-1 tank, hidden around the corner of the house, destroyed several T-[U. Another KV-| damaged "Tiger". At the same time, the gunner was killed and the tank commander was wounded. Another "tiger" destroyed 6 tanks

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T-34 and one KV-2. Other tank companies of the tank regiment of the Leibstandarte also entered Kharkov.

Fierce fighting continued throughout the day of March 12 in Kharkov. Soviet snipers successfully operated from the rooftops of the city. Even the heavy guns of the anti-aircraft division of the Leibstandarte were put forward for direct fire. Assault guns and armored personnel carriers also took part in the battles. On the evening of March 11, the 11th company of the 1st SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment reached Red Square without encountering resistance. But already on March 12, fierce battles began on the square, and it changed hands more than once.

The morning report of the SS Panzer Corps on March 12 described the situation as follows:

"In the first hours of the morning, the enemy continues to fight in Kharkov, with significant forces. Were noticed:

- 2nd Guards Tank Corps with three tank brigades and one motorized (mechanized. - B.S.) brigade;
- 1st Guards Tank Corps with one tank brigade. and 19th Rifle Division;
- the remnants of the 104th Infantry Division (probably referring to the 104th Infantry Brigade. - B.S.);
- 350, 303 and 104th rifle divisions.

From 10 o'clock in the western part you can see the retreat of the enemy. The position of the enemy in the sectors of Bogodukhov, Grayvoron, Borisovka, Zolochiv clearly indicates a retreat to the east and northeast. It is not yet possible to see the general intentions of the enemy. He may intend to hold the areas of Donetsk, Mzhysk, Merefa, as well as Kharkov. North of Kharkov, he can retreat to the Lysychansk-Belgorod line. Counterattacks at Tsirkunov confirm his intention to move to the Kharkov region. With the retreat of the right wing of Kempf's army group, attacks along the Belgorod road should be expected.

The Reich division with weak forces (1.5 battalions) provides cover for the line passing through the heights southwest of Karasevka and the eastern outskirts of Karasevka to the

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railroad track near Shapovalovka. The main part of the division, operating on the northern bank of the Uda River, reached the outskirts of the city, waging a fierce battle along the Perevalovskaya-Kharkov road and, moving out of the forests to the northeast of it, breaks into the city. Enemy resistance weakens. |

By 10 o'clock the division reports that its forward motorized units have advanced one kilometer west of the station, where they have joined up with the 3rd Battalion of the Deutschland Regiment (Wisliceni). Similarly, the Leibstandarte division broke into the city from the north, northeast and east. At 10 o'clock, the advanced units reach Hill 103.3, south of Red Square, as well as the intersection of the Kharkov-Volchansk and Kharkov-Chuguev roads. On March 11, at noon, the order was given to transfer the main efforts to the eastern flank of the division. One remaining unused battalion was transferred to the eastern flank, which took 24 hours.

The Totenkopf Division, without the Panzergrenadier Group attached to the Reich Division and without the engineer battalion to rebuild supply bridges, is currently looking for ways to move east.

A stronger enemy is located in Tsirkunov, where the northern outskirts had to be temporarily left in the face of superior enemy tanks.

As a result of warming, road conditions have deteriorated significantly, especially in the sector north of Kharkiv. There are no roads running from west to east. For this reason, the arrival north of Kharkov of larger units takes time.

The following options are currently available:

1) Fulfillment of the order of the army.

The blockage of the front of the division "Reich" will absorb significant forces. It will take a long time to move north. The divisions of the "Reich" division could not be transferred to the east of Kharkov before the afternoon of March 13, 1943.

Combat units of the "Gotenkopf" division can be assembled on the morning of March 13, 1943 around Losev.

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The main forces of the Leibstandarte division remain locked in battle in Kharkov. It follows that the "Reich" division will arrive too late to carry out the pursuit of the Soviet troops. It is still impossible to foresee when the order to stop the attack will reach the troops and where they will then be. Together with other parts of the "Gotenkopf" will be ready for the pursuit.

2) Execution of the order of the corps command.

Leave the divisions "Reich" and "Leibstandarte" to attack Kharkov, so that then, together with the division "Reich", the Leibstandarte could move out of the city in the direction of Zmiev.

"Totenkopf" will be moved through Tsirkuny, Losevo to arrive at the Chuguev station.

The forward units of the "Reich" division are in the northwestern part of the city and have advanced to the railway station. The enemy is weak. New battles in the southwest. The enemy is retreating there too. In the south, the enemy is withdrawing from the Uda region. The continuation of the offensive of the Leibstandarte in the southern part of the city will lead to complete success and will make it possible to quickly seize the Osnova-Bezlyudovka road. The main forces of the Reich division could be there on the morning of March 13, 1943.

Pursuit by three divisions along the Lyubotin - Pererechnaya - Dergachi road to the southeast is not guaranteed.

As with the withdrawal from Kharkov in February, Hausser now had no intention of blindly obeying the order. Goth was afraid that in Kharkov the SS men would be drawn into protracted street battles, as happened at one time in Stalingrad. But the commander of the German 4th Panzer Army did not take into account that the Soviet forces in the Kharkov region were much smaller than they had once been in Stalingrad, and they were in danger of being outflanked and encircled. In street battles, the Germans had a significant advantage due to their extensive experience in the use of assault groups and much better interaction between different types of weapons. The Red Army adopted assault groups from the Germans during the battles for Stalingrad, but they acted much less skillfully than the enemy. And the interaction of various types of troops in the Red Army left much to be desired right up to the very end of the war. Therefore, in the street

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In battles, Soviet troops suffered significantly greater losses than the enemy, compared with losses in field battles. And there was a certain sense in Hausser's proposal to complete the defeat of the enemy directly in the city.

Goth wanted to bypass Kharkov and create a threat to the Soviet units defending it from the east. On March 12, at 1] 50 hours, he called on Hausser by radio to scrupulously carry out his orders, in particular the order to withdraw the Reich division from street fighting. But ten minutes later, at noon, the assault groups of the Reich division had already approached the Kharkov Central Station. Hausser counted on his two divisions to quickly break the Soviet resistance in Kharkov. That's why,

in order to formally fulfill the order, he first withdrew only a few units from the fighting. Goth in his radio address repeated once again: "I place on the commander of the SS Panzer Corps all responsibility for the execution of my order to withdraw the Reich division from the battles for Kharkov and transfer it north of Kharkov to the eastern flank of the corps."

In fact, the Harmel battle group, having completed its task in Kharkov and united with the Leibstandarte, already on the evening of March 12, moved through the northern part of the city in the direction of Rogan to cut off the enemy's retreat along the Rogan-Vodyanoye line.

On the night of March 2, 13, Soviet aircraft dropped 35 bombs on the positions of the SS Panzer Corps. On the same night, the Harmel battle group with the 1st battalion and regimental units of the Deutschland regiment began to withdraw, leaving cover from the 3rd battalion. She headed along the railway line to the western part of Kharkov and at dawn, at 7:45, set out through Red Square, Litvinovka, Bolshaya Danilovka in the direction of the tractor plant.

To the south-west of Kharkov was Bissinger's battle group of the 2nd Battalion of the Deutschland Regiment. Her patrols found out that Soviet troops had left the southwestern quarters of the city, and only weak Soviet units remained on the southern outskirts of Kharkov,

numbering by

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a row of 150 people with two artillery pieces. The Bissinger group easily destroyed this barrier.

In the north, after the departure of the Harmel battle group, the fighting continues with the Leibstandarte, which has to fight for every house, for every meter of Kharkov streets. The Red Army soldiers fiercely resist using anti-tank rifles, grenades and Molotov cocktails. Soviet snipers fire from houses. But two-thirds of the city is already in the hands of the Germans. The Soviet rearguards barricaded themselves in the southeastern part of Kharkov, mainly with the help of barricades, covering the withdrawal of the remnants of the garrison to the east.

At 0030 hours on March 13, the forward Totenkopf units reached the area southeast of Bayrak. At dawn, they advanced in the direction of Rogan and destroyed the enemy units near Sokolovka, which were trying to withdraw to the southeast. At 15:00, after the battle south of the village of Koropy, the division reached the heights located north of Rogan. Here she withstood strong counterattacks from the east and northeast. During the battle on the northern outskirts of Tsirkunov, the Totenkopf destroyed, according to a report from the division headquarters, 10 T-34 tanks. In total, according to the corps headquarters, 1] and on March 12, the SS tank corps destroyed 47 Soviet tanks (mainly T-34) and 52 artillery pieces.

On March 13, the SS Panzer Corps sent a report to the High Command of the SS Troops, complaining about the heavy losses in equipment, primarily in the Reich division:

"1) The offensive launched on February 18, 1943, with the aim of destroying the Russian motorized forces that were breaking through to Dnepropetrovsk, involved the SS Panzer Corps in offensive battles and pursuit of the enemy, which continued until March 10, 1943 at a distance of 420 kilometers ditch, partly in dense snow cover, partly in deep mud caused by thaw.

Since the corps had been in a state of continuous combat for three weeks already, and the vehicles, mainly tanks, had covered distances of many hundreds of kilometers, at the beginning of March we

note a significant decrease in the number

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military equipment at our disposal, especially in the Reich division, which is almost always in the center of attacks. It got to the point that in this division they remained combat-ready

only 8 T-Shi tanks 6 assault guns.

Since such actions of pursuit over long distances are not uncommon, the organization of the SS Panzergrenadier Division should be reviewed so that it retains sufficient combat capability with significant losses in armored vehicles ... "

Hausser proposed that each division should be divided into tank and panzer-grenadier brigades, and the latter, reinforced by self-propelled artillery, should bear the brunt of pursuing the defeated enemy, so that scarce tanks would not waste their motor resources in vain. This reform will be carried out only in the Bundeswehr, after the Second World War.

On March 13, at 10 p.m., the command of the 4th Panzer Army transmitted an order to the headquarters of the SS Panzer Corps for the next day. It stated in particular:

"... With the offensive forces of the Reich and Gotenkopf divisions, the SS Panzer Corps crushes enemy resistance in the north and on the Kharkov-Chuguev road, advances to the Uda River, east of Vodyanoye and Chuguev, and cuts off the stepping enemy the possibility of retreat to the other side of the Uda and Donets. It is necessary that the passage through Chuguev be quickly blocked.

The corps will continue to destroy the enemy in Kharkov with the forces of the Leibstandarte and take the city. Reconnaissance in the direction of the Donets should be sent on both sides of Saltov and in the direction of Volchansk. It is especially important to reveal in time the intention of the enemy to counterattack..."

On the night of March 14, the Harmel battle group (Deutschland regiment) captured the Rogan station, but was forced to stop due to lack of fuel. It had to be supplied by air, because due to the muddy roads without a hard surface became almost impassable. Because of this, the units of the Totenkopf division and the Harmel battle group were forced to stop at few hours.

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At about 7:30 a.m., the motorcycle-rifle battalion of the Reich division took Lednoye and settled in Zaitsevo, setting up a barrier to the east.

Battle Group Kumm (reinforced Regiment "Führer") attacked at dawn south of Kharkov and at about 10 o'clock took Linden Grove and the southern part of Kharkov, west of Losev. All bridges across the Uda River were destroyed, but they were quickly restored.

At 12:30 pm, the Harmel battle group finally receives fuel dropped by parachutes east of Losev. By 2 pm it reaches the heights located to the east of the Vasishchevo station. At 5 p.m., the combat group cut the railway south of the station and occupied the heights around Ternovaya at the crossroads located east of the tractor plant and Rogan station. Here Harmel's group destroyed 3 T-34 tanks and a Ztanka T-70. At this time, the Leibstandarte continued fighting in Kharkov. At 5:15 p.m., he occupied the center of the city. The assault group (Baum's regiment) of the Totenkopf division took Rogan and set out for Chuguev at dawn. At 1] hours it reached heights four kilometers east of Rogan. During the day, Yu-87 Shtukas dive bombers and Yu-88 attack aircraft made about 500 sorties, hitting all concentrations and movements of Soviet troops. They notably supported a tank attack southeast of Borisovka, destroying many Soviet tanks.

On March 14, the battle began at the tractor plant, located six kilometers east of Kharkov. It was defended by Soviet infantry and tanks. Tall factory chimneys were used as observation posts. Battlegroup Kumm (reinforced Führer Regiment) is to take the plant with the support of the 2nd Battalion of the Deutschland Regiment and fire support from all artillery battalions. Artillery preparation begins on the night of March 14-15. The 2nd Battalion of the Führer Regiment is making a detour from the south, through the southern airfield of Kharkov, while the 2nd Battalion of the Deutschland Regiment is preparing to attack west of the tractor factory.

On March 15, the Harmel battle group was supposed to establish contact with the Knobelsdorf tank corps near the station

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Zidki, with the 6th Panzer Division at Borovaya and the 11th Panzer Division at Karachevka. The main forces of the "Reich" division (combat group of the "Führer" regiment) were to take Osnova and strike at Losevo, advancing along the road leading to Volchansk in order to reach the line of the Donets River in the area of Saltov and Volchansk.

The Totenkopf division broke into Chuguev on the night of the 14th to the 15th and cleared the city of the enemy by noon. Thus, the way to the east was cut off for the Kharkov garrison.

The Leibstandarte, meanwhile, began cleaning up the southeastern quarters of Kharkov. Some Soviet units are surrendered, others are destroyed.

The Soviet units, caught between the SS Panzer Corps and the HEUSH Panzer Corps, are trying to retreat to the southwest and southeast.

In the meantime, the 2nd battalion of the Deutschland regiment and the motorcycle rifle battalion that arrived to help him remain in positions west of Osnova and west of the locomotive plant. The 2nd Battalion of the Führer Regiment attacked south of the locomotive factory at dawn, using a dowry. his tanks and assault guns. One Soviet battalion retreats in the direction of Bezlyudovka. Then the German battalions attack the factory area and take the enemy by surprise. Soviet troops are waiting for the enemy from the west, and Stadler's battalion appears from the south. At noon, the entire factory district is in the hands of the Germans. About 2,000 Soviet soldiers are retreating to the south and southeast. At 5 p.m., units of the Führer regiment take Losevo.

On March 16, the SS corps was to prevent the retreat of Soviet forces to the line Ternovaya - Kharkov road - north of Chuguev - Rogan station. One of the battle groups of the Life Standard is to hit the flank of the Soviet troops retreating along the Kharkov-Belgorod road and cut off their rear.

In the middle of the day on March 15, the commander of the 3rd Tank Army, P. A. Rybalko, gave the order to withdraw to the left bank of the Seversky Donets. In the evening, the Kharkov garrison broke through the encirclement to the southeast, fought about 30 km, crossed

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ruled through the Donets and Kutra March 17 joined the troops of the South-Western Front.

On March 16, Soviet troops, surrounded to the west by the Chuguev-Rogan-Bayrak line, tried to break through to the north and northeast. To meet them, a deblocking strike was being prepared along the Volchansk-Kharkov road by forces of reinforcements hastily assembled in the Belgorod region.

The Harmel battle group (SS Regiment "Deutschland") repelled several attempts to break through, destroying the Ztank T-34. On the right flank, at noon, communication was established with the KhEUShtank Corps.

Between the Rogan station and Osnova, 8 Katyushas remained with a small supply of shells and fuel. Kumm's combat group, supported by tanks and assault guns, as well as the rocket-propelled mortar division of the corps, attacked the Losevsky Tractor Plant, which was defended by two rifle regiments with 8-10 tanks, and captured it by 9000 hours. The Soviet units tried to break through to the east and northeast to Rogan, Charming and Bayrak. From the east, they are attacked by a relief grouping, which is opposed by the Weiss motorcycle reconnaissance battalion. At noon, a dozen Soviet tanks attack Liptsy.

The Totenkopf division, which was supposed to be replaced by the Reich units, is forced to stay behind to repel attacks from the south, southwest, west and northwest.

At 8 o'clock in the morning, the reinforced regimental group of the Leibstandarte moved from the northern airfield of Kharkov onto the road leading to Belgorod. The Soviet units attacked it from the forests located south of the Small Passages, but unsuccessfully, losing 5 tanks. At 3 p.m., the reinforced 1st Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the Leibstandarte attacked on both sides of the road to Belgorod, trying to pincer the enemy at Liptsov.

[On March 7, the Harmel battle group reached Liptsy in the afternoon, having been subjected to intense attacks by Soviet attack aircraft on the way. However, the group did not suffer losses, since Soviet pilots were still poorly able to hit tanks and moving vehicles. Battle Group Kumma (Regiment Fu

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rer") was reinforced by Fick's motorcycle rifle battalion and the last tanks of the Reich division (the remnants of the Tichsen tank battalion). At 09:00, the 2nd Battalion of the Fuhrer (Stadler) Regiment, with the support of a motorcycle and infantry battalion, attacked Mikhailovka and captured it by 12:30. In the evening, after a fierce battle, he captured the village of Uncovered. The reconnaissance battalion of the "Reich" division reported that the Soviet troops were retreating to the north, leaving only a few tanks to observe the Germans.

In Chuguev, the Totenkopf division repulsed all Soviet attacks and destroyed 21 tanks. Its individual units reached Zarozhny. In Chuguev it was replaced by the 11th Panzer Division. In the meantime, the Leibstandarte entered the line Zhuravlyovka-Sherbakovka-north of Prudyanka and Zolochov.

The "Dead Head" division continued its offensive to the northeast towards the village of Nepokrytoye and the regional center Stary Saltov. The 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, weakened by the fighting on the Donets, was defending here. March 19, he was forced to withdraw. The bridge across the Donets was destroyed by the Stukas when Soviet horsemen were crossing it. They had to retreat across the ice, fighting German tanks and infantry.

On March 18, Goth issued an order according to which "the 4th Panzer Army should attack in the Volchansk-Belgorod direction in order to destroy the enemy west of the Donets, in cooperation with the army group Kempf (left), and prevent the arrival of other Soviet forces through Donets.

The SS tank corps seizes the crossings across the Donets near Belgorod. With one division on both sides of the Kharkov River, he attacks Belgorod along the Cheremoshnoye-Mikoyanovka line. Parts of the cover must be broken through with a concentrated force, and the enemy must be driven back, which is located southeast of Belgorod.

In no case should the corps allow the enemy, located south of Volchansk, to force him to change the direction of attack. To cover the eastern flank, one division (Totenkopf) must be echeloned from the right back across Nepokrytoye in the direction of Bochkovka.

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The line Liptsy - Dementievka should be crossed at 4 o'clock in the morning. To control Kharkov, while waiting for the arrival of the battalion provided for this, the SS Panzer Corps leaves one battalion.

On the right [the 1st Panzer Division was to advance on Stary Saltov. On the left, the Grossdeutschland division of Army Group Kempf was preparing to attack with its right flank along the western bank of the Lopan in a northeasterly direction.

On March 18, at dawn, the reinforced Fuhrer regiment captured Veselyaya Lopan and Vysokoe. The enemy retreated to the north and northeast. Nechaevka and Bochkovka were taken at 1 pm. The Deutschland Regiment then joined the Fuhrer Regiment in order to continue the offensive against Belgorod with it.

The strongest right column of the Leibstandarte at about 5 o'clock in the morning began to move along the Kharkov-Belgorod road, meeting only weak resistance. At about 11.30 she went to the southwestern outskirts of Belgorod. At noon, an advanced group of armored vehicles broke into the city. During fierce fighting, 17 Soviet tanks were destroyed. The retreating Soviet columns also suffered heavy losses.

In [] 30 minutes later, the Wisliceny battle group (3rd battalion of the Deutschland regiment) also broke into Belgorod from the south and met with strong resistance. Harmel's group came to her aid. The tanks and assault guns of these two groups destroyed [4 Soviet tanks. Belgorod was taken in 4 hours. The 69th Army retreated to the eastern bank of the Donets.

On the night of March 18-19, Soviet aviation bombarded Belgorod, which had already been abandoned by the Red Army.

In the battles for Belgorod, the commander of the Reich division, Oberfuhrer Herbert Ernst Fall, was seriously wounded. He was replaced by the commander of the artillery regiment of the division, SS-Oberführer Kurt Brazak.

On March 19, the SS Panzer Corps was cleaning up the western bank of the Donets. On this day, the commander of the [th battalion of the Deutschland regiment, Sturmabführer Erat, was appointed military commandant of Belgorod.

20th of March. Around 6:30 a.m., the 3rd Battalion of the Regiment

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"Deutschland" (Visliceni), with the support of "Shtukas" dive bombers, took the village of Stary Gorod on the eastern bank of the Donets, forming a bridgehead there. The Reich division reached the Donets on a wide front.

Until March 22, fighting continued on the front of the Leibstandarte and "Grossdeutschland". Then there was a lull. The battle for Kharkov is over. The southern face of the Kursk Bulge was formed.

And how was the situation assessed by the Soviet side? Marshal Vasilevsky recalled: "The enemy counteroffensive and the rapid withdrawal of the troops of the right wing of the Southwestern Front created a serious threat to the left wing of the Voronezh Front, whose troops were also extremely weakened in offensive battles, but still continued to advance in a western direction.

In early March, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief instructed me to return to the Voronezh Front. The command and headquarters of the front were then in Belgorod. Having visited the troops and headquarters of the 3rd Panzer Army, I became convinced of how serious the situation was, and I reported it in detail to the Supreme Commander. He ordered to transfer to the Voronezh Front a group of troops of P. S. Rybalko from the South-Western Front. But this was not enough.

On March 4, the enemy began the second stage of the counteroffensive, inflicting a powerful tank strike with concentrated forces on the Voronezh Front from the area southwest of Kharkov. Using significant superiority, especially in tanks and aircraft, the enemy, after bloody battles on March 7, broke the resistance of the heroic troops of the left wing of the Voronezh Front and forced them to begin a retreat to Kharkov ...

After March 7, the situation on the left wing of the Voronezh Front continued to deteriorate. On the night of March 10, I had a detailed telephone conversation with the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. We discussed what the Headquarters should do to immediately and seriously strengthen the Kursk-Belgorod-Kharkov direction. We decided to urgently transfer

there are two combined arms and one tank armies. In the directive of the Headquarters, addressed to the commander of the Price

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K.K. Rokossovsky, commander of the Voronezh Front, F.I. Golikov, commander of the Voronezh Front, said:

"The exit of the enemy's southern group north of Kharkov to the Cossack Lopan region creates a difficult situation for the Voronezh Front and threatens to destroy the rear of the entire Central Front. The enemy intends to move towards Belgorod, break through to Kursk and link up with the Oryol group of German troops to reach the rear of the Central Front. The headquarters decided to advance Katukov's tank army to meet the enemy rising to the north with the task, together with the 21st Army, to defeat the enemy's southern group and eliminate the threat to the Central and Voronezh fronts. Headquarters orders: 1. Immediately advance the 21st Army towards Kursk, so that no later than March 13 the army advances south of Kursk, intercepts the main highway and begins an accelerated movement towards Oboyan. 2. To provide all possible assistance to Katukov's tank army in unloading and moving forward side by side with the 2nd Army as quickly as possible. Headquarters brings to your attention that both the 21st Army and the tank army of Katukov are transferred from March 13 of this year to the command of the commander of the Voronezh Front.

Deputy Chief of the General Staff A.I. Antonov, who was at that time in Kursk as a representative of the Headquarters, was ordered to take all measures for the fastest advance to the Psel River of the 21st Army, Lieutenant General I.M. Chistyakov. The army was supposed to hold this line firmly, cover Kursk from the south and ensure the deployment of the 1st Panzer Army, which arrived here from the reserve of Headquarters. The headquarters also instructed to urgently transfer to the command of the Voronezh Front the 64th Army of Lieutenant General M.S. Shumilov, who was in its reserve in the Stalingrad region. The troops of the Voronezh Front continued to stubbornly defend the approaches to Kharkov, but they themselves, with their relatively weak forces, could not restrain the tank pressure of the Nazis and were forced to leave the city on March 15. Near Belgorod, the main blow of the enemy fell on the extremely weakened 69th Army General

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Lieutenant M. I. Kazakov. The SS Panzer Corps advanced from the south, and the army corps advanced from the west. The Nazis continuously bombed Belgorod. On March 18, the enemy broke through from the south and captured the city. The command of the Voronezh Front and I left it early in the morning and moved to the Oboyan area. I would like to note that even with all the unexpectedness of the enemy counteroffensive, our withdrawal did not bear traces of confusion and confusion. Neither order nor command and control of the troops were violated, although it was hard for everyone to part with the cities and regions so dear to our hearts. Soviet intelligence missed the concentration of German tank groups, and the command of the Voronezh and Southwestern Fronts failed to realize the scale of the enemy threat in time. The transfer of the 21st and 1st Panzer, and then the 64th Army, to the Voronezh Front was clearly too late. They could no longer join the battle before the beginning of the spring thaw and somehow influence the situation in the area of Kharkov and Belgorod. Another thing is if, immediately after the liquidation of the Stalingrad grouping of Germans, the 21st Army would have been transferred not to the Central Front, but to the Voronezh or Southwestern Front, if the 64th Army, left as a reserve, had been transferred there as well. Stakes in the Stalingrad area, if the 1st Panzer Army by February 17 had completed the formation not in the rear of the North-Western Front, in which it was supposed to attack Pskov, but behind the rear of the Voronezh or South-Western Fronts, the course of events in the south could be completely different. Then Manstein's counterattack would have received a powerful counterbalance in the form of three armies, which, in turn, could have launched a powerful counterattack on the Yug group of armies, which would certainly have led to the retention of Kharkov by the Soviet troops, and with favorable development events - and to their capture of bridgeheads on the Dnieper. After all, the German tank divisions before the counteroffensive were weakened in the previous

defensive battles, suffered significant losses, especially in armored vehicles, and would hardly have been able to cope with a fresh Soviet tank army. It's a shame that the Soviet command had forces to counter Manstein's plans, but they used

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the Soviet command failed to beat them. The Headquarters, having overestimated the extent of the defeat of the southern wing of the German Eastern Front, decided to transfer part of the forces from the south to conduct offensive operations in the central and northwestern sectors of the front. The command of the Voronezh and South-Western fronts realized the scale of the enemy counterattack too late and was unable to create sufficiently strong groupings of troops to counter it, including through counterattacks. The latter would be the most effective means under conditions when the positions that had just been occupied by Soviet troops during the offensive were poorly adapted for defense. However, the defending Soviet troops were forced to limit themselves to local counterattacks, which could not turn the tide. Both Golikov and Vatutin, however, as well as the leaders of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command - Stalin, Zhukov and Vasilevsky, were far inferior to Manstein in the art of war.

For some reason, little attention is paid to the fact that the success of Manstein's counterattack near Kharkov was determined not only by the talent of the German commander, but also by the mistakes of the Soviet command, primarily the Headquarters. However, even in the case of optimal actions on the Soviet side, the Manstein plan would still be the best course of action for the Germans. Then the field marshal would hardly have been able to return Kharkov, but to bleed Soviet tank formations in oncoming battles and to hold the approaches to the Dnieper crossings would have been a very real task.

By the way, the best course of action for the Soviet command would be to surrender Kharkov without a fight, so as not to suffer unreasonably large losses in the struggle for the city, which still could not be held, as well as in the event of a forced retreat from the Kharkov region under fire against - Nika. It would be worthwhile to start preparing a retreat to Belgorod immediately after the defeat of the divisions and corps advancing towards the Dnieper was determined, i.e. no later than March 5th. Then it would be possible to avoid heavy street fighting, in which the troops of the front suffered disproportionately high losses.

In that

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In any case, the Voronezh Front would have been able to save its strength and almost certainly hold Belgorod, for which the SS Corps, bled dry by long marches and battles against the 6th and 3rd Panzer Armies, would not have had enough strength to take it. With such a development of events, the conditions for the beginning of the summer campaign for the Red Army would have been much more favorable than it actually turned out to be. However, considerations of prestige dominated both the Headquarters and the front command. General Golikovna might risk suggesting that Stalin leave Kharkov, knowing that this would be followed by accusations of defeatism. -

Subsequently, after the final liberation of Kharkov by the Red Army, the Extraordinary Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Atrocities claimed that in Kharkov the soldiers of the Leibstandarte killed Soviet wounded in Kharkov hospitals. At the trial of war criminals in Kharkov on December 15-18, 1943, as a result of which, according to a predetermined sentence, two employees of the secret field police, an Abwehr officer and a hi-vi driver from Soviet prisoners of war, were executed, three witnesses, Professor, doctor and nurse unanimously testified that "On March 13, 1943, three trucks with soldiers from the SS division "Adolf Hitler" drove up to the hospital (1st General Evacuation Hospital of the 69th Army, located on Trinkler Street). They kicked down the doors of Unit 8 and threw incendiary grenades inside. There was a fire. When the wounded tried to escape by jumping out of the windows, they were shot from machine guns. The next day, 9 SS men arrived, who expelled the medical staff from the premises and shot everyone in the wards. The wife of one of the wounded, who came to visit him on March 15, found only "a bloodied and mutilated body

her husband lying between the bunks. His head was crushed, one eye was gouged out, his arms were broken, and blood was still oozing from the wounds. The Soviet prosecution asserted that in total about 800 wounded were shot, burned and finished off with rifle butts and bayonets, and 300 people were burned alive. It was also alleged that one of the wounded, captured in the basement of the Sanitary and Hygienic Institute, where the hospital was located, was crucified by the Germans.

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takh of a barn in the yard of a house at 12 Trinkler Street. They undressed him, cut off his genitals and ears, after which they crucified him with the inscription "Yuda" on his chest. "I, as an artist," claimed the witness V. S. Osalchuk, "made a sketch of this terrible execution." But this drawing was never published.

It should be noted here that the Soviet Extraordinary Commission thoroughly discredited itself by issuing a false conclusion on the Katyn case, in which it attributed this Soviet atrocity to the Germans. It is not known how reliable the data on German atrocities in Kharkov are. Soviet investigators had a great temptation to attribute to the Germans, in particular, the victims of Soviet repressions, whose burials were found during the war years, including by the Germans themselves. For example, the Extraordinary Commission unearthed a burial site in Drobitsky Yar near Kharkov, where, according to witnesses, the Germans shot local residents, mostly Jews, in December 1941 and January 1942. 500 corpses were exhumed, of which 215 were subjected to a forensic medical examination. It turned out that almost all the dead were killed by a shot in the back of the head at close range. But this is the style of the NKVD (this is how the Poles in Katyn would have been shot), and not the German Sonderkommandos, who preferred to shoot at a fairly considerable distance and rather randomly, without a special task to hit any particular part of the body. Therefore, there is a very high probability that the victims found in Drobitsky Yar in 1943 were actually shot by the NKVD in 1937-1938 during the Great Purge.

By the way, the differences in the execution technology were explained not only by the greater experience of the executioners from the NKVD, who had been practicing this business since the 1920s (there is a wonderful story by Vladimir Zazubrin "Shchepka", which shows that already in It was precisely this technique of execution that was practiced—in the basement, at close range, in the back of the head), but also by the circumstances under which the Sonderkommandos and the NKVD carried out their executions. The Germans shot Jews (and they only shot Jews en masse).

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and Gypsies) in the emergency conditions of war. They tried to shoot as many people as quickly as possible at the least cost. For the latter reason, in particular, they quickly abandoned the use of gas-fired vehicles. In order to kill the victims with carbon monoxide, and then still deliver them to the place of burial, it was necessary to burn too much scarce gasoline. Therefore, they were shot in the open air, in large batches, mainly in large ravines or anti-tank ditches, so that the corpses could be immediately buried and not be bothered later with their transportation and disposal. The unfortunate ones were undressed, but not tied up, so as not to mess around, but a problem would arise - with what to tie? Handcuffs, and even simple ropes for many thousands of people who are shot at a time, you will not get enough. Therefore, there was no way to shoot at the back of the head at close range. First, if the executioner gets too close to the doomed, they may simply pounce on him in desperation. There's nothing left to lose anyway. Secondly, it is necessary to more or less fix the head of the convict. But a man in a big hole, with his hands and feet free, will not calmly wait for death. Therefore, the Germans preferred to shoot from a relatively long distance with rifles, machine guns and machine guns. Pistols as an instrument of execution in this case were not suitable due to the short range of aimed fire. But this method of execution had its costs. Far from all of those shot were mortally wounded, so there were quite a few surviving witnesses to the atrocities of the Sonderkommandos of the SD.

The NKVD executed its victims slowly, in comparatively small batches, with sense, feeling, and order. The unfortunate were shot in enclosed spaces, most often in basements of a not very large size, since a maximum of 4-5 people were executed at the same time, and often they were shot at all one by one. The victim was tied with his hands behind his back, and sometimes with his legs, or even tied or handcuffed to a wooden shield, so that it was possible to shoot at the back of the head almost point-blank without fear of missing.

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In any case, for the murder of the wounded in the Kharkov hospital, if it really took place, not a single officer or soldier of the Leibstandarte was punished. Former division commander Sepp Dietrich, who was not mentioned on the pages of this book, Joachim Peiper, and some other officers and soldiers of the Leibstandarte were convicted by an American tribunal after the war for the well-proven killings of American prisoners of war by soldiers of the division during the Ardennes operation of 1944, although responsibility for this Dietrich and Peiper remains a matter of debate. And for the murder of the wounded in Kharkov, along with other crimes, in 1943 they preferred to hang two Gestapo men, the captain of the Abwehr and the collaborator-chauffeur.

As for the story of the murder of the wounded in the Kharkov hospital, there are a number of obvious inconsistencies in the testimonies of witnesses, which, if the case were considered in a truly independent court, with the participation of lawyers, the latter would not fail to turn attention is paid to them as evidence of the inconsistency of the version of the prosecution. The first question arises with the number of wounded killed. It is known that in early March 1943 there were 6,500 wounded in Kharkov hospitals. Of these, 4.5 thousand were evacuated from March 6 to March 10, the rest remained in the city and fell into the hands of the Germans. It should be noted that they were not able to evacuate the most seriously wounded, as they say, "lying", so they themselves could not leave the hospital after the retreat of our troops. But then the question naturally arises: if 800 wounded were killed by the Nazis, then where did the other 1200 go? Local residents, with all their desire, could not make out in their homes and hide such a large number of the wounded, in conditions when street fighting was going on in the city. And if the Germans did not kill 1,200 wounded, but sent them to the camp, then, one wonders, why were the other 800 less happy? Of course, someone could be shot in the heat of battle, avenging their dead comrades. It's a common thing in war. In the end, a grenade could have been thrown at the door of the house without realizing that there was a hospital there, but in this way hoping to smoke out the Red Army soldiers who had settled in the house. But,

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If we believe the testimonies of witnesses, the next day there was an already pre-planned action to destroy the wounded. Then another question arises: why did the SS, having completely exterminated the wounded, at the same time trample all the medical personnel - completely unnecessary witnesses to the crime? And it is not clear how the Soviet doctors determined that the SS men came to the hospital, and even from the Leibstandarte "Adolf Hitler"? After all, the field uniform of the SS troops practically did not differ from the field uniform of the Wehrmacht, and there were no SS runes on white camouflage helmets. I suspect that the witnesses would not have survived a sensible cross-examination.

As for the episode with the Red Army Jew crucified on the doors of the hospital, it really looks like a legend. There is a completely identical legend, repeatedly replicated by Soviet propaganda, about guards private (or junior sergeant) Komsomol member Yuri Vasilyevich Smirnov, during the operation "Bagration" wounded who was captured by the Germans on June 25, 1944 near the village of Shalashino Vitebsk region, who refused to answer the questions of the enemies and for this they crucified on the wall of the dugout. By the way, it was alleged that soldiers and officers of the 78th SS assault division had killed Smirnov, although this division had nothing to do with the SS troops. He was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, forever enrolled in the lists of the unit - the 1st company of the 1st battalion of the 77th Guards Rifle Regiment

26th Guards Rifle Division, his feat was mentioned in the order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. But too much this feat looks like a myth. Indeed, there was a squad leader, junior sergeant Yuri Vasilievich Smirnov, who was born in 1925 in the town of Makaryev, Ivanovo region, who died in battle on June 25, 1944 near the village of Shalashino, Dubrovinsky district, Vitebsk region, but in the division's report on irretrievable losses, dated August 21 1944, even before he was awarded the title of Hero on October 6, Yu.V. Smirnov is listed as killed on June 25, not as a prisoner. Most likely, Soviet propaganda simply decided in this way to use

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use Christian symbols for their own purposes. What greater value could a squad leader have as a "language"? At best, he could give the number of his regiment and division, which the Germans already knew from his Red Army book. It's better to say where the tank landing, in which it was located, followed. By the time of the interrogation, the Germans also probably already knew this. A simple sergeant is not some kind of staff captain or major. Well, the Germans could, of course, shoot Smirnov out of anger, but in order to mess around with the crucifixion... They didn't have any other concern, when the Soviet offensive was in full swing and the German defense was bursting at the seams? Moreover, one could easily find oneself in captivity and experience the revenge of the Red Army soldiers for the crucified comrade... What is characteristic, the photograph of the crucified Red Army soldier was not preserved, and the most common surname in Russia was taken as the surname for the hero. In the decree of 1944, he was listed as a Red Army soldier, and in 1978 a special decree was issued, where he was already listed as a junior sergeant. By the way, it comes from an ancient pagan name with the same root WITH THE WORD "SMMIIRNY". Who knows, maybe the surname Smirnov really reflects the mentality of the Russian people?

The story of the nameless Kharkov wounded looks just as dubious. He probably had to hang for a long time, at least a day, or even more. Dozens, if not hundreds of people should have seen it. It's not every day that people are crucified! But why was this terrible incident not reflected in someone's diaries, letters, but there were only three residents of a neighboring house who told this story in exactly the same way at the trial. In the Katyn case, we know well how the NKVD knew how to prepare witnesses.

It is curious that the story of the Soviet wounded who died in 1943 in Kharkov itself began to generate myths: Former military intelligence officer and writer Ovidy Gorchakov wrote in his story "Attention: a miracle mine!" that in the fall of 1941, immediately after the first German occupation of Kharkov, "with the permission of the commandant and head of the garrison of the city, the SS men

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Viking divisions burn and shoot alive about four hundred wounded Red Army soldiers in the army hospital on Trinkler Street - the hospital did not have time to evacuate. The fact that this is pure fantasy is proved by just one fact: in 1941, as, indeed, in 1943, the SS Viking division did not enter Kharkov, it operated on the outskirts of Rostov-on-Don. Gorchakov took information about the massacre of the Viking fighters with the wounded in Kharkov from Peter Neumann's book *The Black March*. This book, first published in [1956] in French under the title *The Black March*, was later translated into English and became a bestseller in the United States. *The Black March* was presented as a genuine diary of the Viking division officer (at the end of the war - Haupt-Sturmführer). In fact, *The Black March* is a work of fiction, and not only because the Viking never had officer Peter Neumann. It is characteristic that the German edition of the book still does not seem to have appeared, which suggests that

the original text was not written in German, but in French. The book is full of absurdities, and, except for the episode with the wounded in Kharkov, it is literary through and through. By the way, the Kharkov process was well known in the West. Stalin viewed it as a rehearsal

the future of the Nuremberg trials and allowed foreign correspondents to Kharkov. The SS men in Neumann's book are presented as real beasts, killing, torturing and raping civilians, especially Jews (Neumann, in particular, strangles his Jewish bride with his own hands and, together with his friends, kills Jews on Kristallnacht). From Neumann's book, in particular, there was a story that in the schools of the SS troops, cadets were forced to dig in during exercises at a very limited time. Those who did not have time to dig a deep enough trench were allegedly crushed to death by the tanks.

The Black March is undoubtedly a propaganda novel disguised as a genuine document. This work was supposed to expose the SS troops, to prove that the Nuremberg Tribunal was right when it declared them a criminal organization. "Black March" was supposed to

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to resist Hausser's book "The SS in Battle" and other memoirs of former SS generals and generals of the Wehrmacht, which just in the mid-50s began to appear in Germany, the USA and European countries. Peter Neumann is undoubtedly a pseudonym, reminiscent of the "new man" that the Nazis wanted to create, and what, they say, this man is in reality. The name Peter, too, may not have been chosen by chance. Translated from Greek, it means "stone" and, perhaps, hints at the firmness of the author of the diary in the Nazi faith. Maybe someday we will know the name of the true author. But there is no doubt that he never served either in the Viking division or in the SS troops in general.

Today we cannot say with certainty whether the soldiers of the Leibstandarte killed the wounded in Kharkov hospitals in March 1943 or not. Certainly different. During the course of the war, individual soldiers and officers of the Waffen-SS more than once committed war crimes, i.e., murders of prisoners of war, murders and other types of violence against the civilian population, including executions of hostages. But exactly the same crimes were committed by the soldiers of the Wehrmacht, as well as the Red Army, as well as, albeit to a lesser extent, the troops of the Western allies. But the SS troops were not involved in crimes against humanity. This was done by the SD and the Gestapo.

On the evening of March 18, 1943, the headquarters of the 4th Panzer Army summed up the four weeks of the counteroffensive. The army order stated that the following Soviet connections:

- 25th tank corps with three tank brigades and one motorized brigade;
- 15th tank corps with two tank brigades;
- 12th tank corps with two tank brigades and one motorized brigade.

And:

- 10 rifle divisions;
- 3 rifle brigades;
- 2 tank brigades;
- | brigade of the NKVD;
- | Czechoslovak legion.

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According to the headquarters of the SS corps, the following Soviet formations also suffered heavy losses and partially lost their combat effectiveness:

- 6th Guards Cavalry Corps with two cavalry divisions;
- 6 rifle divisions;
- | artillery brigade.

A few more formations suffered losses, but did not lose their combat capability.

- [th Guards Cavalry Corps with three cavalry divisions;
- | th Guards Tank Corps with one tank brigade, one motorized brigade and one rifle division.

Among other things, were captured or destroyed between February 21 and March 18, 1943:

- 567 tanks (including 29 reconnaissance);
- 1072 artillery pieces;
- 68 air defense guns;
- 1182 anti-tank guns.

The figures for captured and destroyed military equipment and weapons are most likely close to the truth, especially when you consider that the Germans got almost all the armored vehicles of the encircled tank corps, which was under repair.

Headquarters reserves had to be hastily transferred to the Voronezh Front. The 2nd Guards Tank Corps was transferred to the 69th Army, and the 3rd Guards Tank Corps to the 40th Army. The 1st Panzer Army was hastily transferred to Kursk. The 21st Army took up defensive positions between the 40th and 69th armies. The 64th stood between the 69th and 3rd tank armies. These measures, along with the ensuing thaw, ruled out the possibility of developing the offensive of Army Group South to the north in order to eliminate the Kursk salient. In addition, such a large-scale operation could not be carried out without the participation of the neighboring Army Group Center. And just in the days of the battle for Kharkov, she was engaged in the evacuation of the Rzhev-Vyazma bridgehead and repelling the offensive of the central and right wing of the Voronezh Front. This group of armies was not ready for the transition to an immediate offensive.

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The losses of the SS Panzer Corps between January 30 and March 20, 1943 in killed, missing and wounded were distributed among the divisions as follows:

- "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler": 167 officers, 4373 non-commissioned officers and privates. Total: 4540.
- "Reich": 102 officers, 4396 non-commissioned officers and privates. Total: 4498.
- Totenkopf: 94 officers, 2170 non-commissioned officers and privates. Total: 2264.
- Corps units and subunits: 2 officers, 215 non-commissioned officers and privates.

Total: 217.

- Total: 365 officers, 11,154 non-commissioned officers and privates.

According to the collection of losses prepared by the Russian Ministry of Defense, in the Kharkov defensive operation in February-March 1943, the South-Western Front lost 15,412 killed and missing and 12,813 wounded and sick. The Voronezh Front irretrievably lost 29,807 people. Its sanitary losses amounted to 28,437 people.

It is worth noting that out of the three divisions of the corps, the Gotenkopf suffered half as many losses as each of the other two divisions of the corps. This is quite natural, since the "Dead Head" division arrived only in the middle of the offensive. The total losses of other German troops were most likely at least twice the losses of the SS Panzer Corps. Let us take into account that the number of other troops participating in the battle for Kharkov in February-March 1943 was at least twice as large as the SS corps, but played a less active role in the battle and suffered fewer losses. Then the total losses of the German troops operating in the Kharkov area and on the outskirts of the Dnieper in the period from the beginning of February to March 18 can be estimated at least 35 thousand killed, wounded and missing. Losses of Soviet troops only in the Kharkov defensive operation from March 4 to March 25, in which the 6th Army of the Southwestern Front and the 3rd Tank, 40th and 69th Armies of Voro were involved

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Nezhsky Front, and at the final stage also the 21st Army, urgently returned from the Central Front to the south, amounted to 45,219 irrevocable people and 41,250 sanitary people. And this is only according to official data, which significantly underestimate, as a rule, irretrievable losses. In addition, the battles involving the SS Panzer Corps accounted for the bulk of the losses of the Voronezh Front and the 6th Army of the Southwestern Front during the Voronezh-Kharkov operation, which took place from January 13 to March 3, 1943. In this operation they lost 41,599 killed and missing and 74,539 wounded. Undoubtedly, Soviet losses exceeded the German ones by several times. According to the German estimates cited above, Soviet losses amounted to more than 9,000 prisoners and 35,000 killed, and only in the "cauldrons" in the Lozova (so-called Kegichev "cauldron") and Kharkov, in the Zmiev-Chuguev region.

In 1943, the Germans no longer captured a large number of prisoners, numbering tens and hundreds of thousands in one single "cauldron". They no longer had the strength to encircle several Soviet armies and fronts. As in the March battle for Kharkov, the groupings of encircled Soviet troops did not exceed 5-6 divisions. Now the Germans now lacked infantry to create a dense encirclement. In addition, the command of the encircled, in contrast to 41-42, now did not lose control of the troops and strove to break through to their own at all costs. Therefore, the encircled suffered significantly greater losses in killed than

prisoners.

SS TROOPS IN THE BATTLE OF KURSK

The concept of Operation Citadel has already been described many times in detail. Hitler intended to cut off the Kursk Salient with strikes from the north and south and encircle and destroy 8-10 Soviet armies in order to shorten the front and prevent a large-scale Soviet offensive in 1943. This would allow the release of troops for the defense of Italy, which was under threat after the capitulation in May 1943 of the German-Italian troops in Tunisia. The Germans never encircled such a number of Soviet troops even in the years that were much more prosperous for them [194] and 1942. So the encirclement plan was obviously unrealistic. The Germans, who were inferior to them both in the number of personnel and in the amount of weapons and military equipment, would hardly have been able to hold the front against such a mass of encircled. |

The commander of the 4th Panzer Army, General Goteshe, on June 20, half a month before the start of Operation Citadel, believed that "Russian motorized and tank forces located east of the Kursk Bulge would collide with the Kempf army group. According to information available today, the number and strength of these formations are such that one army group "Kempf" will not be able to destroy them. Probably, it will be necessary to deploy to the east to participate in a tank battle the 4th Panzer Army with its two tank corps, providing its rear with infantry

divisions... Only after carrying out this part of the operation will it be possible to link up with the 9th Army... Recently, the enemy has further strengthened his

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according to reliable information, advanced the 4th Panzer Army ... to the Oboyan, Kursk region ... Despite this, the successful conduct of Operation Citadel is still possible. However, given the wide scope of the enemy's measures, it will take a longer time than could be expected until now. Therefore, the unification with the 9th Army will take place later than the scheduled date. It can be assumed that after breaking through both defensive lines of the enemy, the task of the 4th Panzer Army will be to defeat the 1st Russian Panzer Army, because without its destruction the operation is unthinkable. In fact, even before the start of the operation, the destruction of Soviet reserves, and not the seizure of territory, including Kursk itself, came to the fore as its main goal.

In fact, Citadel's main task was to grind up Soviet operational and strategic reserves in order to prevent the subsequent transition of Soviet troops to the offensive in the southern and central sector of the front. This plan was only partially successful. The troops of the Voronezh and Central Fronts, as well as the strategic reserves transferred to their aid, were thoroughly battered, but not destroyed. Accordingly, the Soviet offensive was only delayed, not prevented, and its possible results were reduced. In particular, during the second phase of the Battle of Kursk, when the Soviet troops were already advancing, not a single large grouping of German troops was surrounded and captured.

In Operation Citadel II, the SS Panzer Corps acted as the main striking force of Army Group South, which dealt the main blow. The 4th Panzer Army and the Kempf Army Group had 9 tank and motorized (Panzer-Grenadier) divisions in its grouping allocated for the attack on Kursk, while the 9th Army, advancing on Kursk from north, there were only 7 such divisions. Such a concentration of tank divisions on the southern wing of the German Eastern Front (here in reserve was the 24

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Hitler's desire for economic and political reasons to keep the Donbass and Kharkov.

The main grouping of the 4th Panzer Army of the Germans, as part of the KhGUSH of the SS Panzer, Army and P Panzer Corps, struck from the Tomarovka, Borisovka, Kozatskoye area to the north along the Belgorod-Oboyan highway, along the shortest direction to Kursk.

As for the statements of Soviet and Russian historians about the delay of the German offensive by 3 hours as a result of Soviet artillery counter-preparation, this is nothing more than a Soviet myth that was born in wartime and has survived to this day. The Germans did not start major operations at night. The Citadel began at exactly the appointed time — at 3.00 Berlin time (5.00 Moscow time) on July 5 with artillery preparation. At 0600-0610 the main forces of the infantry and tanks attacked. Two hours earlier, reconnaissance units of the SS divisions had captured the heights they needed. According to the headquarters of the Voronezh Front, at 02:30 the enemy, with a force of up to three infantry battalions, with air support, attacked and captured the outpost positions of the 52nd Guards Rifle Division of the 6th Guards Army in the Yakhontov area.

The 8th Air Corps of the Luftwaffe, which supported the offensive on the southern face of the Kursk Bulge, received an order "to pay special attention to the concentration of available forces over the breakthrough section of the II SS Panzer Corps." As a result, Hausser's corps was supported by four times as many aircraft as the adjacent XL/VIII Panzer Corps of von Knobelsdorff.

The Luftwaffe acted quite effectively against tanks, in contrast to the Soviet aviation, which until the end of the war had not learned how to reliably hit the enemy.

armored vehicles (we will see this in the two Balaton battles as an example). The reason was both the lower level of training of Soviet pilots and the fact that the German Yu87 Shtukas, including its anti-tank variant, had an overwhelming advantage in combat effectiveness over the main Soviet anti-tank

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tank aircraft - the Il-2 attack aircraft, since during a dive, the accuracy of shooting and bombing was an order of magnitude higher than during an attack. Only 46 best pilots of the Luftwaffe, who flew the Yu-87S-1 anti-tank modification with two 37-mm NaK18 guns, in 1943-1945 on the Eastern Front knocked out and destroyed, according to German estimates, 2414 tanks and self-propelled guns, which is about 4 % of all irretrievable losses of tanks and self-propelled guns for this period, amounting to 60.9 thousand. For Soviet pilots, the real indicators of destroyed enemy armored vehicles were calculated in a few units. This is confirmed by the examination of German armored vehicles left on the battlefields. The proportion of tanks and assault guns hit from the air is tenths of a percent. | |

An attempt to turn the IL-2 into a "tank destroyer" completely failed. Back in December 1942, IL-2 attack aircraft appeared, armed with two 37-mm ShFK-37 cannons suspended under the wing, and in the spring of 1943, IL-2 appeared, armed with two 37-mm NS-37 cannons in the same arrangement. But, unlike the Junkers Li87, intended for diving, the IL-2 attack aircraft did not initially have sufficient reserves of static stability and could conduct aimed fire only when the "work" of the left and right guns was completely synchronized, which in practice - Failed to push. From the recoil at the very first shot, the plane began to wind from side to side and from top to bottom. The only effective anti-tank weapon of the Soviet assault aviation was the PTAB-2.5-1.5 HEAT bomb (weight 2.5 kg), which was first used en masse on the first day of the Battle of Kursk on July 5, 1943. In the combat irretrievable losses of Soviet tanks and self-propelled guns in the Battle of Kursk, 91% were due to artillery (including tank), 4% to mine explosions, and 5% to Luftwaffe strikes.

The Germans dominated the air throughout the battle on the Kursk Bulge. The reasons for the development of the situation in the air, which were unfavorable for the "Stalin's falcons", were well shown in his article "The Battle of Prokhorov" by A. Akhmedov. It's dos

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This was achieved through the centralized use of aviation, as well as the maximum use of each aircraft (sometimes one aircraft could make 2-3 sorties a day) due to the most rational placement of field airfields. Thus, during the Battle of Kursk, German landing sites (for communications aircraft and light army reconnaissance aircraft) were located 5-7 km from the front line, and the bulk of the field airfields were located only 18-30 km from the front line, while the Soviet field airfields were located 40-60 km from the front line, partly because of the fear that if they were closer to the front line, they would be subjected to more intense influence from the Luftwaffe, who dominated the air. Each German aircraft had a transmitting and receiving radio station, and the German units of the first line also had special air controllers equipped with means of communication both with the headquarters of the air groups seconded to this sector of the front, and with the commanders of the air squadrons currently in the air. In the Soviet fighter and attack aircraft operating over the battlefield, radio transmitters were at best placed on the aircraft of squadron commanders and above, while ordinary pilots had only receivers (the situation was similar in the Soviet tank troops). There were no advanced air controllers in the Red Army at all. They did not appear even in the Soviet Army after the war due to the complete absence of appropriate means of communication. Only at the end of the war, when about 36,000 radio stations of various types and purposes were supplied under Lend-Lease, they tried to occasionally use aircraft controllers to aim aircraft at targets, but without much success. Usually, the Soviet commanders of the air armies and the commanders of the air corps sent their representatives to the headquarters of the front and the headquarters of the armies, under

which they were ordered to hold from the air. These representatives kept in touch with their command by means of an ordinary wired telephone, and besides, not their own, but a local headquarters, constantly busy for other purposes. As a result, information to combat air units is transferred

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given too slowly. Often, by the time the planes took off for a given area, the situation there had already changed several times, and the flights were carried out in vain. At the same time, ammunition and motor resources were wasted and the pilots were exhausted, and blows were often delivered to their own, which was an especially frequent occurrence in the Battle of Kursk, where the situation changed very quickly, and the Soviet headquarters often did not know at what lines their troops were located, and at what - AGAINST TEEVNIK.

The suddenness of the German offensive on July 5 was out of the question, since on July 4 Manstein carried out a private operation to capture Tomarovka and shot down Soviet military outposts in order to improve positions for the offensive. This operation was carried out in the HEMSH section of the tank corps. Thus, an additional goal was also achieved: to divert the attention of the Soviet command from the direction of the main attack, where the SS tank corps had to operate.

By the end of the first day of the offensive, penetration into the defenses of the 6th Guards Army was achieved to a depth of 5-6 km in the offensive zone of the KhEUSHkorpussau Cherkassky and 12-13 km in the zone of the I Corps of the SS in the Bykovka-Kozmo-Demyanovka area. The SS divisions broke through the first line of defense to the full depth, pushing back the 52nd Guards Rifle Division. On the sector of this division, the Leibstandarte and the "Reich" on a front of 10 km advanced to a depth of 10 km, capturing several settlements. The advanced units of the 51st Guards Rifle Division, which was on the second line of defense, entered the battle. Between parts of the 52nd division a gap of 6-8 km was formed.

Thus, on a front 5-6 km wide, the SS divisions approached the second line of defense occupied by the 51st Guards Rifle Division, and even started a battle with its outposts. However, the right-flank neighbor of the SS corps, the army group "Kempf", on July 5, could not significantly press the formations of the 7th Guards Army. A gap formed between the flanks of the SS corps and the army group, to cover which Hausser for three

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the following days he was forced to use the Totenkopf division. She was opposed by the 375th Infantry Division.

According to the German archives, on July 5, on the southern face of the Kursk Bulge, German losses amounted to 640 killed, 5240 wounded, 131 missing - a total of 6011. These were the largest losses in all the days of the Citadel.

On July 6, the SS corps had 334 tanks in service, including 114 tanks and 23 assault guns in the "Dead Head" division of Brigadeführer G. Pris, 99 tanks and 23 assault guns in the Leibstandarte brigade of the Führer T. Wisch, and "Reich" of Brigadeführer Krueger - 12] tanks 21 assault guns. By the beginning of the fighting, 494 tanks and assault guns were listed as combat-ready in the corps, so about 93 vehicles were lost on the first day. On the second day of the offensive, the corps was supposed to break through the second line of defense near Yakovlevo and reach the Pseyola bend near the village of Teterevino.

At about 9:00 am on July 6, 1943, after a powerful artillery barrage and with the support of 150 aircraft of the 8th Air Corps, the SS divisions attacked the 154th and 156th Guards Rifle Regiments. During the artillery preparation, the control and communication posts of the regiments of the 51st Guards Rifle Division were put out of action, which upset the command and control of the troops. Each Soviet battalion fought

by oneself. Due to the good interaction between the infantry, tanks, artillery and aviation, the advanced units of the SS divisions, supported by tanks and assault guns, managed to advance to the Soviet positions even during the artillery preparation, and at the moment of its completion were only a few hundred meters from enemy trenches.

By 13.00, the battalions at the junction of the two mentioned rifle regiments began a disorderly retreat in the direction of the villages of Yakovlevo and Luchki. Only the left-flank 158th Guards Rifle Regiment survived. During the unorganized retreat, the 154th and 156th Guards Rifle Regiments were overtaken by enemy tanks and motorized infantry and suffered heavy losses. So, in the [56th regiment of 1685 people by July 7, no more than 200 remained in the ranks, and as a combat unit it actually ceased to exist. Some units of the 154th and [56th

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regiments went to the location of neighboring divisions. Only the artillery of the 51st Guards Rifle Division and the 5th Guards Stalingrad Tank Corps, which had come up from the reserve, could slow down the advance of the Germans. A short-lived battle flared up for the village of Luchki, where the 464th Guards Artillery Battalion and the 460th Guards Mortar Battalion of the 6th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 5th Guards Tank Corps were stationed. At 14.20, the armored group of the Reich division as a whole captured the village of Luchki. The Soviet artillery retreated to the north of the Kalinin farm. It turned out that the guns did not have infantry cover, since the motorized rifle battalions of the 6th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade had not yet arrived at the battlefield. The main forces of the anti-tank artillery of the army (14th, 27th and 28th oiptabr) were located on the Oboyanskoye Highway and in the offensive zone of the HR USh of the tank corps. It was this direction that, after the first day of fighting, was regarded by the army command as the direction of the main attack of the Germans, while in fact the German command attached no less importance to the blow of the SS corps, and perhaps even more. At that moment, the 6th Guards Army had no more artillery to repel the offensive of the Reich division.

Meanwhile, the 3rd Panzer Corps of the Kempf Army Group, which was delivering an auxiliary strike to the north, made it difficult for the Soviet command to localize the area of the main strike and maneuver forces and means to threatened directions. As a result, the Germans were able to consistently defeat Soviet units and formations, including the reserves advanced from the operational depth, which led to heavy losses in manpower, weapons and military equipment.

The offensive of the Leibstandarte in the Oboyan direction in the first half of the day on July 6 developed more slowly than the Reich offensive, both because of the greater density of Soviet artillery and because of the counterattacks of the | th Guards and 49th Tank Brigades 3 th mechanized corps of the 1st tank army M. E. Katukov. Played a role and a stronghold in the village

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Yakovlevos, where stubborn street battles unfolded with the participation of the tank regiment of the Leibstandarte.

By 2:00 pm on July 6, the SS corps crushed the left flank of the 6th Guards Army and captured the important stronghold of Yakovlevo. Now the Kh1-USh tank corps was to replace it. The divisions of the SS Corps were now to meet the Soviet operational reserves. However, the HEGUSH tank corps failed to capture bridgeheads on the northern bank of the Pena River and reach Yakovlevo to replace the SS corps.

The success achieved by the Leibstandarte and "Reich" forced the command of the Voronezh Front to take urgent measures to localize the breakthrough in the second line of defense. Vatutin handed over to the 6th Guards Army the 5th Guards Tank Corps of General A. G. Kravchenko, numbering 213 tanks, including 106 T-34s and 21 Mk-U "Churchill", and the 2nd Guards Tank Corps of Colonel A. S. Burdeyny, numbering 166 combat-ready tanks, including 90 T-34s and 17 Churchill MK-PU. He approved the proposal of the army commander I.M.

Chistyakov about inflicting counterattacks on the divisions that had broken through the II of the SS Panzer Corps by the forces of these corps. On July 6, Chistyakov ordered Kravchenko to withdraw the 5th Guards Tank Corps from the defensive area he occupied to strike at the flank standard. Meanwhile, in the defensive area of the corps, places for ambushes and anti-tank strongholds were already ready. Kravchenko doubted the expediency of a counterattack, but under the threat of a tribunal he was forced to submit. The attack began at 15.10.

The 5th Guards Tank Division had very little artillery, and there was no time left to organize interaction with neighbors and aviation. Therefore, the counterattack began without artillery preparation and air support. The tanks moved across the flat terrain. "Reich" met the frontal attack of the Soviet corps with the fire of its tanks, supported by dive bombers and attack aircraft. Two brigades of the 5th Guards Tank Corps suffered heavy losses and were forced to go on the defensive. At 5 p.m., the Reich tankers launched a counterattack with the support of anti-tank weapons.

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diy and by 19 o'clock went around from the flanks and reached the communications of the defending tank brigades in the area of the Kalinin farm. The 1696th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment and the Luchkovartillery and mortar units of the 6th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade defended here. After encircling the main forces of the 5th Guards Tank Corps, "Reich" tried to capture the Belenikhino junction. However, the 20th Tank Brigade of Lieutenant Colonel P.F. Okhrimenko, which found itself behind the encirclement, together with the rear parts of the corps, created a tough defense around Belenikhino and repelled the attack. Having no connection with the headquarters of the corps, on the night of July 7, the surrounded brigades made a breakthrough. Those who were lucky enough to break out of the encirclement joined with units of the 20th Tank Brigade. On July 6, 1943, the 5th Guards Tank Corps irretrievably lost 119 tanks in battle, another 9 tanks were irretrievably lost due to technical or unexplained reasons. Another 19 damaged tanks were sent for repairs. These were record losses for one Soviet tank corps during the entire period of the Kursk defensive operation. Even the losses of the corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army near Prokhorovka were less. As combat units, the two encircled tank brigades ceased to exist.

In the meantime, a detachment of the Reich tank regiment, taking advantage of the confusion during the retreat of the Soviet units, went near the Teterevino farm to the third (rear) line of defense, occupied by units of the 69th Army of Lieutenant General V.D. Kryuchenkon. However, due to lack of forces, after several tanks were knocked out, the Leibstandarte fighters retreated. The exit of German tanks to the third line of defense of the Voronezh Front already on the second day of the offensive caused great discontent in the Headquarters.

On July 6, the Totenkopf Division was unable to break the resistance of units of the 375th Rifle Division. In the afternoon, the counterattack of the 2nd Guards Tatsinsky Tank Corps began, which had 166 tanks. To repel it, even some units of the Reich division had to be used. Losses of the 2nd Guards Corps on this day

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turned out to be relatively small. They amounted to: 17 tanks burnt out and 11 knocked out. The hull retained its combat capability.

On July 6, at a front of 16 km, in the sector of the 51st Guards Rifle Division and the 5th Guards Tank Corps, the Leibstandarte and Reich broke through the second line of defense to a depth of 4-5 km. Having failed to capture Pokrovka in battles with the 1st Guards Tank Brigade, the Leibstandarte turned north. In this regard, Katukov ordered the 100th tank brigade of Colonel N.M. Ivanov from the 31st tank corps to go to the Bolshaya Mayachki area and, in cooperation with the 5th Guards Tank Corps, defeat the enemy that had broken through and restore the situation. By the end of the day, the 100th Tank Brigade stopped the enemy, but could not restore the situation. On this day, the irretrievable losses of the 1st Panzer Army amounted to 37 tanks.

The Stavka did not expect that the enemy would break through the main defensive lines of the Voronezh Front so quickly. The Headquarters demanded "at all costs to stop the enemy's swift advance at the turn of the river. Psel, seizing the initiative in his own hands. She ordered "to exhaust the enemy on prepared lines and prevent his breakthrough until our active operations begin on the Western, Bryansk and other fronts." Already on July 6, a decision was made to move the 5th Guards Tank Army of P.A. Rotmistrov and the 5th Guards Army of A.S. Zhadov to the Voronezh Front. The Germans knew that starting from July 9, Soviet tank reserves and new rifle divisions were advancing to the battlefield on the southern face of the Kursk salient, but they did not know their exact composition, as well as the time, directions and nature of their actions.

On the night of July 7, Vatutin ordered the 31st Tank Corps to advance to the Teterevino area with the task, in cooperation with the 5th Guards Tank Corps, to defeat the enemy that had broken through and restore the situation on the second lane east of Yakovlevo. The 29th Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade, operationally subordinate to the 1st Tank Army, was transferred there from the 40th Army.

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The front commander also decided to reinforce the 1st Tank Army with the 180th and 192nd Tank Brigades, which previously operated as part of the 38th Army, with 222nd 1244th anti-tank artillery and 66th Guards mortar regiments; The 52nd and 67th Guards Rifle Divisions of the 6th Guards Army were withdrawn from the front line and suffered heavy losses.

The SS Panzer Divisions "Reich" and "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" were planned to be used to attack the flank and rear of the 1st Panzer Army from the east.

On the Dubrova-Petrovsky section of the front, 20 km away, the Germans, with the help of the KhG \ VSH tank corps and the II SS tank corps, wedged into the defenses of the 3rd mechanized, 31st tank and 5th guards tank corps, 90th, 67th, 51st Guards rifle divisions to a depth of 2 to 14 km at 20.00 continued stubborn tank battles in the areas of Gremuchy, Pokrovka, M. Mayachki, Luchki, Greznoye, Teterevino farm, Yasnaya Polyana, trying to develop success in the direction of Oboyan. The Leibstandarte and the Reich reached the greatest penetration, defeating the 3rd Tank Corps and the 5th Guards Tank Corps. By the end of the day, the second line of defense was broken through on a front of 25 km to a depth of 16 km. On the front, 10 km in the section Red October - Yasnaya Polyana, the SS divisions were 2 km from the rear defense line. In three days they advanced 32 km.

On the left flank of the 3rd mechanized corps on the morning of July 7, after a powerful air and artillery preparation, the Leibstandarte continued the offensive in the Yakovlevo-Pokrovka sector. The 1st Guards Tank Brigade came under attack. At about 10 o'clock, under the onslaught of the enemy, she was forced to leave Pokrovka. The commander of the 3rd mechanized corps had to bring into battle the 49th tank brigade of Lieutenant Colonel A.F. Burda, which immediately deployed into battle formation and attacked the enemy. The SS men had to retreat from Pokrovka.

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It was not possible to defeat the enemy grouping that had broken through at the junction of the 1st Tank Army and the 5th Guards Tank Corps and restore the situation on the second line of defense, since the 31st Tank Corps was delayed in reaching the Teterevino area. The Luftwaffe destroyed crossings on the Solotinka River in the areas of Sukho-Solotino and Kochetovka. The advanced units of the corps, which reached this line on the morning of July 7, were counterattacked by units of the Reich division and were forced to retreat to the west. Only in the middle of the day the advance of the SS was stopped at the turn of Bolshaya Mayachki, Greznoye. By that time, the 3rd mechanized corps had suffered heavy losses. The reserve of the corps - the 49th tank brigade - had already been brought into action. At

The commander of the 3rd Panzer Army also had no reserves. Under enemy pressure, the 3rd Mechanized Corps and the 100th Tank Brigade of the 31st Tank Corps were forced to withdraw to the north.

M.E. Katukov had to move the 192nd tank brigade of Colonel A.F. Karavan, which arrived from the 38th army, the 222nd and 1244th anti-tank artillery regiments, 138th and 139th PTR battalions, as well as the 112th tank brigade of Colonel M.T. Leonov from the second echelon of the 6th tank corps.

At 11:00 pm, the commander of the Voronezh Front ordered a counterattack at 10:30 am on July 8 by the forces of six tank corps and two rifle divisions in order to cut off the front in the Syrtsevo-Shopino sector against six tank divisions (the division "Grossdeutschland" was formally listed as motorized, but had more tanks than most panzer divisions, so we count it as a panzer division) and one enemy infantry division. Vatutin emphasized that "the main task of the counterattack is to defeat the enemy grouping in the area of Belenikhino, Erik, Shopino, to reach the front of Syrtsevo, Yakovlevo, Kozmo-Demyanovsk, Bykovka, Erik, Shopino." The 10th Panzer Corps was to advance in the direction of Vasilievka, Yakovlevo. The 2nd Panzer Corps was to reach the line Kozmo-Demyanovka, Bykovka. 5th Guards Tank

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The corps was to advance in the direction of Krapivinskiye Dvory, Gremyachy, and the collective farm "Smelo to Trud". The 2nd Guards Tank Corps was to advance in the direction of Gonki, the 89th and 375th Rifle Divisions in the direction of Yerik, Shopino. Finally, the 6th and 31st Tank Corps of the 1st Tank Army were to advance in the direction of Syrtsev, Yakovlevka, and Pokrovka.

The start of the counterattack was scheduled for 10.30, but the Germans pre-empted it by resuming at 10.00 the offensive from the Syrtsevo-Greznoye line in the north-western direction. By 1800 they took Syrtsevo, Krasnaya Dubrava, Gremyachy and reached the Lukhanino-Syrtsevo line, the southeastern outskirts of Verkhopenya, the Dry Hole, Sukho-Solotino, Kochetovka, Ilyinsky. In the Krasnaya Polyana area, the 180th Tank Brigade was surrounded. On the sector of the 51st Guards Rifle Division and the 31st Tank Corps, the Leibstandarte advanced 6-7 km.

In the middle of the day, when the 3rd mechanized and 31st tank corps with great difficulty held back the onslaught of the 4th tank army of the enemy, the Soviet counterattack, albeit belatedly, but still took place, however, only on paper. The 2nd and 5th Guards, 2nd and 10th Tank Corps and the left flank rifle divisions of the 40th Army went on the attack. The planned milestones were not achieved. Nevertheless, the German command had to send part of its aviation and tanks to repulse the counterattack and weaken the pressure on the 1st Panzer Army. This was the opinion of the command of the Voronezh Front, followed by Soviet historians. But soon the attack on her position resumed. In the afternoon, as noted in the intelligence report of the headquarters of the Voronezh Front, the troops of the 1st Panzer Army were forced to leave Alekseevka, Syrtsevo, Krasnaya Dubrava, Krasnaya Polyana, M. Solo tinka.

The same reconnaissance report indicated that "in the remaining sectors of the direction, the enemy was engaged in a firefight at the same line." This means that no counterattacks by the 10th and 2nd Tank Corps, 5th and 2nd Guards Tank Corps on

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really wasn't. This is proved by Vatutin's order to the commanders of these corps, given at 14.20, "to stop marking time and advance rapidly." Despite the fact that the tank corps were not going to move forward, at 15.40 the front commander cheerfully reported to Stalin that "nail the counterattack began at 12.30 and is delivered from the front of Vasilievka, Belenikhino (where the 10th and 2nd tank corps and the 5th guards tank corps were located. - B.S.) to Yakovlevo. True, at the disposal of the Deputy Chief of the General Staff A. I. Antonov, the commander

The Voronezh Front on July 0 noted that "On July 8, from 21.00 to 22.00, the tank brigade of the 2nd tank corps advanced to a height of 258.2 (0.5 km north of Teterevino), which by this time was engaged in units of the 183rd rifle divisions. As a result of the battle, there were losses on both sides. In all likelihood, this was the only counterattack attempt made that day and resulted in an absurdly tragic incident.

On July 9, as a result of false information about the disposition of troops, between 07:00 and 09:00, 60 Il-2 aircraft attacked the combat formations of the 183rd Infantry Division in the Vasilievka area, the Komsomolets state farm, height 241.6, inflicting losses on it. Deputy Chief of the General Staff A.I. Antonov ordered the perpetrators to be brought to justice the next day.

At 0900, the German offensive resumed from the Verkhopenye-Greznoye line in the direction of Oboyan. Novoselovka and Sukho-Solotino were taken. On a front of 20-25 km, German troops advanced to a depth of 12 km. From the Greznoye area, the Gotenkopf attacked in the direction of Krasny Oktyabr and Kozlovka. According to the headquarters of the Voronezh Front, "at 19.40 18 tanks continued to fight on the outskirts of Vasilievka." The 2nd Panzer Corps acted against the Gotenkopf division. .

At 11.30 Vatutin ordered the commanders of the 69th and 7th Guards Armies to regroup and defend. The 69th Army included the 183rd, 305th, 107th Rifle Divisions, the 92nd, 93rd, and 94th Guards Rifle Divisions, as well as the 375th Rifle and 89th Guards Rifle Divisions from the 6th Guards Army, 81st Guards Rifle Division

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7th Guards Army, 96th Tank Brigade, 148th Tank Regiment, artillery units and other reinforcements. The 69th Army was given the task of "strongly holding the Vasilievka, Belenikhino, Visloe, Shopino, Chernaya Polyana, Stary Gorod, Blijnyaya Igumenka, and Myasoedovo fronts occupied by the troops, and destroy the enemy in the Melehovo area." [11th and 270th Rifle Divisions from the 69th Army were transferred to the 7th Guards Army.

During the period from 6 to 9 July, the 1st Panzer Army lost 453 tanks in the course of fierce battles (220 of which were irretrievably lost). In total, by the beginning of the fighting, the army had 63| tank, including 120T-60 and T-70. The combat effectiveness of the 1st Panzer Army has fallen significantly.

On July 10, the German command on the southern face of the Kursk Bulge delivered two main blows. One of them was sent from the area west of Prokhorovka to the northeast by the forces of the SS Panzer Corps, and the other was sent from the Melekhov area in the northern direction by the forces of the Shtankov and Kharmey Corps.

Vatutin was still worried about the Oboyan direction, and therefore the commander reinforced the thoroughly battered 1st Tank Army with the 204th Rifle Division, which had previously been in the reserve of the Voronezh Front, and the 10th Tank Corps. On the morning of July 10, they took up defensive positions at the line of the Stalinsky state farm - Kalinovka. The 5th Guards Tank Corps of General A. G. Kravchenko was also subordinated to the 1st Tank Army, which on July 10 concentrated in the area of Zorinskie Dvory.

At 13:00, according to a report from the headquarters of the Voronezh Front, the enemy "with the strength of up to an infantry battalion with 50 tanks and powerful air support of up to 200 aircraft" captured the Komsomolets state farm and Ivanovsky Vyselok. The Leibstandarte achieved this success in the fight against the 2nd Panzer Corps, pushing it 2 km.

In the Korochansk direction, according to a report from the headquarters of the Voronezh Front, the enemy at 18.20 "with the strength of up to two infantry battalions with 50 tanks (13 of them - T-6) with the support of 50 bombers" was advancing from the Sevryukov district in a northeasterly direction.

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Goth was afraid that the advanced units of the 4th Panzer Army would be drawn into heavy fighting for crossings over the Psel, and was afraid of Russian flank attacks. The "Dead Head" division was moved into the swampy floodplain of the Psel River and could not immediately develop an offensive against the Prokhorovka railway station. Only after the Gorkovsk captured the bridgehead on the northern bank of the Psel, the division could begin a maneuver to strike the flank of suitable Soviet reserves. The left flank of the P SS Corps was covered by the infantry divisions of the E.P. Army Corps.

Hausser regrouped the Leibstandarte into the center of the corps' order of battle and immediately committed his panzer-grenadier regiment, reinforced by a company of Tigers, and a reconnaissance battalion into battle. With the support of artillery and aviation, by the end of July 10, they captured the line planned for the counterattack of the 5th Guards Tank Army. In the meantime, the 10th Tank Corps, and then the 5th Guards Tank Corps, were moved by order of Vatutin to the zone of the 1st Tank Army. The front commander feared for the Oboyan direction, and the regrouping of the Leibstandarte to the Prokhorovka direction was not revealed by Soviet intelligence.

Hausser decided to move forward the "Dead Head" division located on the left flank of the corps, having learned that the Soviet 52nd Guards Rifle Division of the 6th Guards Army, which was defending here, began to leave its positions on the night of July 10-11, not waiting for the fresh 95th Guards Rifle Division of the 5th Guards Army to replace it. The 95th Rifle Division deployed across the Psel River, along its both banks, with its left flank to the Oktyabrsky state farm, which was on the path of the Life Standard to Prokhorovka, and then, to the Lutovo farm, they had already begun to occupy the positions of the unit 9th Guards Airborne Division of the 5th Guards Army. The Germans promptly responded to this regrouping by launching an offensive on July 11 at 3:00 am, an hour earlier than usual. The "Dead Head" captured the dominant height of 226.6 on the western bank of the Psel River, and the Leibstandarte delivered a butt blow between the 95th Rifle and 9th Guards Airborne Divisions

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mi on the eastern bank. By 14:00, the Oktyabrsky state farm was taken, and an hour later, the tactically important height 252.2, located 1 km from it. At 17:00, the Leibstandarte occupied Vasilievka, and at 20:00, his tank regiment, turning north, captured the village of Petrovka on the eastern bank of the Psel River. Thus, he entered the line of deployment of the Soviet 5th Guards Tank Army. Rotmistrov recalled: "About nineteen hours on July 11, Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky arrived at our K.I. I reported to him about the combat formation of the army and the tasks assigned to the corps and attached artillery. He approved my decision and said that he had a conversation with the Supreme Commander-in-Chief I.V. Stalin, who instructed him to be inseparably in the 5th Guards Tank and 5th Guards Combined Arms battles and provide the necessary assistance. I.V. Stalin ordered the front commander N.F. Vatutin to remain at his command post in Oboyan. The chief of staff of the front, Lieutenant-General S.P. Ivanov, left for the Korochovsk direction.

There was still plenty of daylight left, and the marshal suggested inspecting the starting areas I had planned for the 29th and 18th Panzer Corps.

Our path passed through Prokhorovka to Belenikhino.

A nimble "jeep", bouncing on potholes, overtook vehicles moving towards the front with ammunition and fuel. The transports with the wounded were moving slowly towards them. In some places, damaged trucks and wrecked wagons were parked on the sides of the road.

The road stretched through vast fields of yellowed wheat. Behind them began the forest adjoining the ksel Storozhevoe.

- There, on the northern edge of the forest, the starting positions of the twenty-ninth tank corps. To the right, the 18th Panzer Corps will advance," explained A. M. Vasilevsky.

He peered intently into the distance and listened to the ever-increasing rumble of battle. From the clouds of smoke, explosions of aerial bombs and shells, the front line of our common troops was guessed.

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shackle armies. To the right, about two kilometers away, the outbuildings of the Komsomolets state farm appeared.

Vlrug Vasilevsky ordered the driver to stop. The car turned onto the side of the road and braked sharply at the dusty roadside bushes. We opened the doors, stepped a few steps to the side. The roar of tank engines was clearly heard. Then the tanks themselves showed up.

- General! What's the matter? - Alexander Mikhailovich turned sharply to me, with annoyance in his voice asked Alexander Mikhailovich. - You were warned that the enemy should not know about the arrival of your tanks. And they walk in broad daylight in front of the Germans...

I immediately threw up my binoculars. Indeed, across the field, crushing the ripened grain, dozens of tanks marched in battle formation, firing from short-barreled cannons on the move.

"But these, Comrade Marshal, are not our tanks. German...

- So... Somewhere the enemy broke through. He wants to warn us and capture Prokhorovka.

"This cannot be allowed," I said to A.M. Vasilevsky and on the radio instructed General Kirichenko to immediately advance two tank brigades towards the German tanks and stop their advance.

Returning to my command post, we learned that the Germans had taken active steps against almost all of our armies.

So the situation suddenly became more complicated. The initial area for the counterattack, which we had previously outlined, ended up in the hands of the Nazis. In this regard, preparation for the offensive and, in particular, the choice of artillery firing positions, deployment lines and attacks had to be carried out anew. In a short time it was necessary to clarify tasks, organize interaction between corps and units, revise the schedule of artillery preparation and do everything for clear command and control of troops in battle."

Probably, under the circumstances, the most reasonable decision would be to postpone the counterattack of the 5th Guards Tank and 5th Guards Armies for at least a day, shifting it to more distant lines and giving commanders time to reconnoitre the area and study the situation. . However

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Vatutin decided not to postpone the counterattack (it can be assumed that Vasilevsky, who was on the Voronezh front, insisted on this). The Soviet offensive was to begin on the morning of 12 July. The situation was aggravated by the fact that before the counterattack, Rotmistrov's tankers marched 330-380 km, which had the most negative impact on the engine life of the tanks and became one of the reasons for the high losses in the Prokhorov battle.

] July, the Leibstandarte failed to capture Prokhorovka. Played a role, among other things, and the attack of the Soviet 1st assault aviation corps, which used anti-tank bombs PTAB-2.5-1.5. On the Kochetovka-Belenikhino sector, the Gotenkopf and the Leibstandarte fought against the 51st, 52nd, and 97th Guards Rifle Divisions and the 2nd Tank Corps. They advanced 8 km and reached the western outskirts of Prokhorovka. At 19.45 Vatutin ordered the commander of the 69th Army and the commander of the 2nd Tank Corps: "Due to your carelessness and poor command, the enemy broke through to Petrovka and Prokhorovka. I order you under your personal responsibility, together with parts of Rotmistrov and Zhadov

to destroy the enemy that has broken through and to reach the Vasilievka and Belenikhino fronts today. Deliver execution." By 23.00 on July 11, counterattacks and the introduction of the 42nd Guards Rifle Division from the reserve of the 5th Guards Army managed to recapture Petrovka from the Leibstandarte and stop it 2 km from the Prokhorovka station. But the originally planned line of the counteroffensive of the 5th Guards Tank Army (the village of Vasilievka - the Komsomolets state farm - the village of Belenikhino) was lost, and it was not possible to reach it again.

The headquarters of the 33rd Rifle Corps reported to the headquarters of the 5th Guards Army:

"11.7. 43. The enemy, with superior infantry forces, supported by 150 tanks (the number of tanks here is fantastic, so many tanks and assault guns of the Leibstandarte have long been gone. - RB.S.) offensive on the Prokhorovka front, Red October.

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Having superiority in tanks, the enemy managed to break through the front line by 18.00 and capture the high. 230.5, h. 252.2, St. "October".

Commander of the 33rd Guards. SK Guards. Major General Popov gave the order to the 95th Guards. SD to Colonel Lyakhov and to the Ru of the 9th Guards. VDD Guards. to Colonel Sazonov with a night attack to dislodge the enemy from their positions and restore their previous position.

In the morning the enemy was supported by up to an infantry battalion. tanks three times attacked the positions of 3 SB 26 Guards. SP. 6 enemy tanks were knocked out.

At 14.00, the enemy again went on the attack for the 4th time, pushed back 3 SBs and occupied the overhead. "October", developing the offensive. in 2 directions — along the grader to Prokhorovka and the highway to Mikhailovka.

By 16.00, the enemy additionally threw 23 tanks into the battle in the direction of Prelestnoe and 30 tanks, for example. Prokhorovka. At the same time, the enemy, supported by tanks, repeatedly tried to advance on the Keys. But, met powerful. art. and ruzh.-machine gun fire, had no success.

The offensive of the infantry and tanks of the pr-ka was suspended at the front: the south side of the ravine, the east. Petrovka, western outskirts of Prokhorovka 230.5".

Running a little ahead, let's say that from this report it follows that during the Prokhorov battle on July 12, after 14.00, the Leibstandarte again occupied the Oktyabrsky state farm, pushing the 9th Guards Airborne Division to the southwest. This refutes the assertion of the commanders of the Soviet tank corps that they managed to hold this state farm that day.

On July 12, the famous Battle of Prokhorov took place, in which the II SS Panzer Corps defeated the 5th Guards Tank Army. The first to give an objective picture of this battle was the German military historian Karl-Heinz Frieser, who published a corresponding article in 1996. Her writing by a German historian was inspired by watching the Soviet film Arc of Fire from the film epic Liberation. He found the picture of the greatest tank battle painted in the film to be entirely false.

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For the first time Frizer reported new data on the course of the battle near Prokhorovka at an international conference in Ingolstadt in September 1993. He said, in particular, that the Soviet tanks in the battle of Prokhorovka outnumbered the Germans by about three to one. He determined the irretrievable losses of the Germans at no more than 5 tanks, and another 43 tanks and 12 assault guns required long-term repairs. Later, Frizer clarified these data and reported in the film about the Battle of Kursk, shown by the RTR-Planeta TV channel, that the irretrievable losses of the Germans in the battle of Prokhorovka amounted to only 3 tanks. On the material of the German archives, Frieser proved that the Soviet claims that the Germans near Prokhorovka on July 12, 1943

lost 300 or 400 tanks - nothing more than a poetic exaggeration contained in the reports of Soviet tank commanders. In fact, the SS Panzer Corps, which opposed the Soviet 5th Guards Tank Army near Prokhorovka, irretrievably lost only 5 tanks, and another 43 tanks and 12 assault guns were damaged. The irretrievable Soviet losses in armored vehicles amounted to significantly more than 200 tanks and self-propelled guns. Such an unfavorable ratio of irretrievable losses in tanks was explained by the fact that the battlefield was left to the Germans. In addition, the Red Army was very bad at evacuating wrecked tanks and just as bad at repairing damaged armored vehicles. There is a story by Chief Marshal of the Armored Troops P. A. Rotmistrov about how Stalin got angry with him after Prokhorovka. This story is cited by F. D. Sverdlov, now, unfortunately, deceased. Here is what Pavel Alekseevich told in the summer of 1964 about the Battle of Prokhorov to Colonel Fyodor Davydovich Sverdlov, with whom he went with the Red Arrow to Leningrad to inspect the artillery academy: "It was the largest tank oncoming battle during the entire Second world war. Then the 5th Guards Tank Army, which I commanded, with two tank corps attached, defeated a large tank group of fascists aimed at Kursk. The Nazis lost about 350 tanks and assault guns, including about 100 heavy Tig

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ditch" and "panther" ("panther" actually was a medium tank, and the SS corps did not have a single piece of them then. - B.S.), created specifically for this operation. After this battle, they were forced to abandon further offensive and went on the defensive. Their entire strategic plan for the 1943 raid was thwarted. This is how the tank task force accomplished its strategic task. True, our losses were no less than those of the enemy. Of course, you don't know, and almost no one knows this..." Pavel Alekseevich paused and, leaning slightly towards his interlocutor, said confidentially: "Stalin, when he found out about our losses, went into a rage: after all, according to the plan of the Headquarters, the tank army was intended to participate in the counteroffensive and was aimed at Kharkov. And here again it is necessary to significantly replenish it. The Supreme Commander decided to remove me from my post and almost put me on trial. Vasilevsky told me this. He then reported to Stalin in detail the situation and the conclusions of the disruption of the entire summer German offensive operation. Stalin somewhat calmed down and did not return to this issue again.

"By the way," Rotmistrov noted with a sly smile, "Army General Vatutin, commander of the front, introduced me to the Order of Suvorov, 1st degree. But this time I'm ordering not received".

Vasilevsky saved Rotmistrov from trial, reporting to Stalin that the German offensive was still stopped.

It is clear why Rotmistrov needed a lie about allegedly destroyed 300 or 400 German tanks - he was saving his own skin from the tribunal. However, the Supreme Commander finally abandoned his intention to bring the unfortunate commander of the 5th Guards Tank Army to court: after all, the Soviet troops won the Battle of Kursk. As a result, the legend of the Soviet success near Prokhorovka was born. For this purpose, the number of German tanks was doubled and a half times - up to 700, and their losses - 5-7 times, up to 300-400 vehicles, in order to make them comparable with the Soviet ones. It is known that the circumstances and actions of the parties in the battle of Prokhorovka were investigated by a special commission headed by

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with G. M. Malenkov, but her materials have not yet been published and are not available to researchers, since they are kept under the heading "top secret".

Subsequent studies of Russian historians, primarily L.N. Lopukhovskiy and V.N. Zamulin, and American historians David Glantz and Jonathan House, based on

Russian archives and their comparison with German data confirmed the correctness of Frieser. Soviet losses in people and armored vehicles were many times higher than the German ones, and the 5th Guards Tank Army, unlike the SS Panzer Corps, actually lost its combat effectiveness.

Interestingly, the T-34 tanks also participated in the Prokhorov battle from the German side. As part of the Reich division on July 1, 1943, there were 8 tridi-fours captured by the SS Panzer Corps at the Kharkov Tractor Plant during the capture of Kharkov in March 1943. July 13 these tanks in the division was already || — either at the expense of new trophies, or as a result of the receipt of new vehicles from repair (on July 1, there were 25 T-34 tanks in the 2nd SS Panzer Corps). It can be assumed that during the battle near Prokhorovka, the losses of the Hausser corps in the "thirty-fours" were insignificant or absent altogether. By the way, the Germans welded commander's turrets to captured "thirty-fours" so that the tank commander could control the battle.

I had a chance to talk with one of the participants in the Prokhorov battle, L. V. Chechkov. Then he was a foreman, commander of the T-34 tank. Although his tank was burned down, Leonid Vasilievich was lucky to survive. On the other hand, out of 50 of his friends in the tank corps formed in Transbaikalia, only five left the battlefield near Prokhorovka alive. Most Soviet tankers did not have the necessary combat experience. Many of them received a baptism of fire on the Kursk salient. This undoubtedly affected both the results of the tank battle near Prokhorovka and the course of the entire defensive battle near Kursk. The real reasons for the termination of the offensive of the Army Group "South", contrary to the popular opinion in Soviet historiography, that the refusal of the Germans to continue the operation "Citadel"

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was caused by the failure near Prokhorovka (which actually did not happen), lie in the fact that on July 12 the Soviet attack against the Orlovsky bridgehead had already begun, and therefore the chances of encircling the Red Army group near Kursk, which from the very beginning "Citadels" were ghostly, now they don't exist at all. Moreover, already when || July began Soviet reconnaissance in combat in the areas of the Western and Bryansk fronts, the command of the Army Group "Center" realized that the "Citadel" was over. The continuation of the attack on Kursk from the south was an unjustified risk and in the future could lead to the encirclement and death of German tank formations. The victory at Prokhorovka still could not change the general strategic situation, which was unfavorable for the German side.

By the beginning of Operation Citadel (on the evening of July 4), the SS Panzer Corps had 327 T-3, T-4, T-6, T-34 tanks and 129 Shtug combat-ready assault and anti-tank self-propelled guns (52) and "Marder" (Magaeg). There were also 5 obsolete T-2 tanks with 20-mm guns and 28 command tanks, most of which lacked artillery weapons and were not used directly for combat. There were only 35 serviceable "tigers" in the corps at that time, and, contrary to the later statements of Rotmistrov and other Soviet memoirists and historians, there was not a single "panther" in the Hausser corps. All the 200 "panthers" (T-5) available at that time in the entire German army were brought together into a brigade and attached to the division "Grossdeutschland" of the KhGUSH tank corps, which for some reason in Soviet sources, contrary to the facts, is stubbornly ranked as the SS. Also in the corps were 54 self-propelled howitzers "Vespe" (\Ue5re) and "Hummel" (Nitte!) And 24 self-propelled guns "Griet" (SgShe), however, they were used against tanks only as a last resort, since they had very weak armor, albeit with a powerful 150-mm cannon, and a conning tower open from above and behind, being an analogue of the Soviet self-propelled artillery mount SU-76. The open cabin made it possible to interact more closely with infantry and other self-propelled guns in urban battles. Self-propelled gunners, for the most part, did not like the SU-76M because of the bulletproof

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armor, the fire hazard of a gasoline engine and an open conning tower, which did not protect against small arms fire from above and grenade hits. The rude nicknames of the SU-76M "Bitch" or "Bare-assed Ferdinand" speak for themselves. Although, on the other hand, the same

an open cabin saved from the cumulative jet of the "faustpatron", which usually probably killed the crew of fully enclosed self-propelled guns and tanks, was convenient for the crew and removed the problem of gas contamination of the fighting compartment during firing. Therefore, sometimes the SU-76M was affectionately called "Zhu Zhu" or "Columbine". The SU-76 had many positive aspects - ease of maintenance, reliability, low noise, high maneuverability in wooded and swampy areas. The German "Grille" possessed the same qualities.

There were only 4 outdated T-2 tanks in the SS corps. With its 20-mm cannon, it could not even hit the light Soviet T-70 and was only suitable for fighting infantry. By July 12, there were also 21 command tanks in the Hausser corps. These tanks did not have guns. For camouflage, the gun barrel was replaced with a wooden imitation, and radio equipment was installed inside the turret. In the "Reich" division, by the beginning of the "Citadel", out of 10 command tanks, 8 were T-3 tanks with 50-mm guns, but on July 1] only 4 such tanks remained in service.

By the end of July 1, the SS corps had 211 combat-ready tanks (T-3, T-4, T-6 and captured T-34) and 100 assault and anti-tank self-propelled guns ("Shtug" and "Marder"), and also 49 Vespe and Hummel self-propelled howitzers and 24 Grile self-propelled guns. There were only 15 serviceable "tigers". The Ferdinands, which Soviet memoirists and historians stubbornly found in the Prokhorovka area, were not only in the Hausser corps, but nowhere nearby within a radius of several tens of kilometers, since all 90 Ferdinands were used in the 9th Army of Army Group Center.

According to other sources, in the II SS Panzer Corps by the morning of July 12, there were 294 tanks and assault guns (without Marders), including 22 Tigers. However, out of this number, 21 vehicles required short-term repairs, so

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only 273 tanks and assault guns could go. In this case, it turns out that 7 "tigers" were at that moment in a short-term repair.

The SS Panzer Corps fought west and southwest of Prokhorovka from 10 to 15 July. At this time, fighting also continued between the German Shtankov Corps of the Germans and the Soviet 69th Army south and southeast of Prokhorovka. On July 12, two mechanized brigades of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps, a separate tank regiment and one tank brigade of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, united in the groups of General K.G. Trufanova. All these formations were subordinate to the headquarters of the Rotmistrov army and consisted of 161 tanks, including 116 T-34s, 45 T-70s and 11 self-propelled guns, as well as 28 anti-tank guns. In addition, they were supported by the 96th Tank Brigade of the 69th Army, which had 20 tanks.

Trufanov was also given the 10th anti-tank artillery brigade, which had 60 guns ZIS-2 (57 mm) and ZIS-3 (76 mm), previously part of the 18th and 29th tank corps. The 1529th heavy self-propelled artillery regiment approaching Prokhorovka, which was armed with self-propelled artillery guns of 152 mm caliber and was intended to reinforce the 29th tank corps, was initially sent to repel the offensive of the German [III] tank corps. . This regiment eventually arrived in the Prokhorovka area, but only at 1800 on July 12, when it was already too late. And the shells of the 1529th regiment were not abundant - only one ammunition load, and the regiment arrived without rear services. As a result, it turned out that on the morning of July 12, Rotmistrov's army had only the 10th Guards Mechanized Brigade and the 24th Guards Tank Brigade of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps in reserve. They numbered 96 tanks and 4 SU-76s. There were no more than a dozen heavy self-propelled artillery mounts SU-122 in the units of the 5th Guards Tank Army near Prokhorovka. It turned out that at the beginning of the Prokhorov battle, Rotmistrov's army was deprived of most of its anti-tank artillery, in

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such a powerful, although not very effective tool as the SU-152. It is possible that if Rotmistrov had been able to massively use anti-tank artillery against the Hausser tanks, the loss ratio would have been more favorable for the Soviet side. If the counterattack had been postponed for at least a day, then most of the anti-tank artillery from Trufanov's detachment could have been returned near Prokhoroka and replenished with ammunition.

180 tanks of the Trufanov detachment, together with three rifle divisions of the 69th Army, on July 12 in the Shakhovo-Aleksandrovka area fought against the German 19th Panzer Division, in which by that time only 14 tanks remained in service - 11 T-Zi 3 T-4, and the 503rd separate battalion of heavy tanks. On the morning of July 11, there were 23 combat-ready "tigers" in it. There are no data for July 12, but it can be assumed that the number of combat-ready vehicles decreased by that day, since the "tigers" often went out of order for technical reasons. The other two tank divisions of the Sh Panzer Corps, the 6th and 7th, had a total of about 50 T-3 and T-4 in service, together with the 228th assault gun battalion, which had 19 Shtugov fought against three more rifle divisions of the 69th Army.

Near Shakhovo on July 12, the day of the Battle of Prokhorov, there was a tragic incident. The 53rd Guards Separate Tank Regiment of the 5th Guards Tank Army, sent as part of the combined detachment of Major General K.G. Grufanov to help the 69th Army, Lieutenant General V.D. Kryuchenkona, not having accurate information about the location of his own and German troops, did not bother to send reconnaissance ahead. It must be said that the Soviet military leaders preferred not to trouble themselves with reconnaissance either before the Battle of Kursk, or at the entrance to it, or after. As a result, the tankers of the 53rd Guards Separate Tank Regiment opened fire on the move against the combat formations of the 92nd Rifle Division and the tanks of the 96th Tank Brigade, which were defending in the Aleksandrovka area, 24 km southeast of Prokhorovka station. At the same time, Soviet gunships sent to support the attack of the 53rd Guards Separate Tank Regiment fired on the 92nd Rifle

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division from the air. Having fought through their own troops, the regiment stumbled upon the advancing German tanks and, after a short exchange of fire, began to retreat rapidly, crushing and dragging separate groups of Soviet infantry with it. Following the line of the front after the 53rd Guards Separate Tank Regiment, the anti-tank artillery mistook the tanks of the 96th Tank Brigade for the German tanks pursuing the 53rd Regiment, and was about to shoot them. But then, fortunately, the senior officer of the General Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Sokolov, and the commander of artillery of the 35th Guards Rifle Corps intervened and prevented another tragedy. The commander of the 69th Army, in a special order, called everything that had happened "disgraceful."

Actually, on the approaches to Prokhorovka on July 12, the SS tank corps fought against the main formations of the 5th Guards Tank and 5th Guards Armies.

The Soviet command, organizing a counterattack with very decisive goals, counting on the first day of the offensive to push the enemy back by 25 km, had a very vague idea of the disposition of the German troops, which very little corresponded to reality. Thus, on July 12, Vatutin, Rotmistrov and Zhadov believed that the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler division was advancing against the 5th Guards Army, and the 5th Guards Tank Army would meet with the Totenkopf Division. In fact, three days earlier, the headquarters of the SS corps had regrouped, and the Dead Head was against Zhadov's army, and the Leibstandarte was against Rotmistrov's army. Only in the intelligence report of the Voronezh Front of July 13, on the basis of data received by the end of the day on July 12, it was stated that "the capture of a prisoner confirms the action of the TD SS 'A. HITLER' (2 MP) in the area of the temporary storage warehouse. OCTOBER (zap. PROKHOROVKA). According to his testimony, to the north of the TD SS 'A. HITLER' the TD SS 'Dead

head" and to the south - TD SS "Reich". Finally, the true order of battle of the SS corps was established.

Directly in the direction of Prokhorovka, only the Leibstandarte operated, which on July 12 included only 56 combat-ready tanks (including 4 Tigers, 47 T-4

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i5T-3), 10 Shtug assault guns and 20 Marder anti-tank self-propelled guns. On the morning of July 12, this division had to repel the attacks of the Soviet 18th and 29th Tank Corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army and the 9th Guards Airborne Division of the 5th Guards Army.

By the beginning of the battle, 68 T-34s, 18 Mk-4 Churchills, 58 T-70s were in service in the 18th Tank Corps, and 122 T-34s, 70 T-70s and 20 self-propelled guns in the 29th Tank Corps. , (11 SU-122 and 9SU-76). In total, two corps had 336 tanks and 20 self-propelled guns, including 190 T-34.

Rotmistrov gave the following order for the offensive to the commander of the 29th tank corps, Major General I.F. Kirichenko: | km north. TSW, KOMSOMOLETs, destroy his grouping in the area of LUCHKI, MAYACHKI, POKROVKA by the end of 12.7.43, go to the POKROVKA area, preparing in the future for operations to the south.

The attack began at 8.30 on 12.7.43. The artillery preparation began at 8.00.

I allow you to use the radio from 7.00 on 12.7.43.

From 0.30 to 1.00 am (from 2.30 to 3.00 Moscow time) the Leibstandarte carried out reconnaissance in force in the direction of the Lutovo farm with the forces of an infantry battalion supported by a company of tanks. As a result, it turned out that a new 25th Tank Brigade of the 29th Tank Corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army had appeared on the front lines. However, Hausser apparently decided that for the time being only one tank brigade had been transferred in order to strengthen the defensive formations. He did not expect that in a few hours the main forces of the 5th Guards Tank Army would fall on the Leibstandarte.

The offensive of Rotmistrov's army began at 8.30 in the morning. Artillery preparation was not very effective. The report of the artillery headquarters of the 5th Guards Tank Army regarding the events of July 12, 1943, stated: "Enemy reconnaissance did not precede the beginning of the artillery offensive, it was not possible to fully establish the presence of enemy fire weapons,

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intelligence data from aviation was not received and there was no communication with it. The artillery of the army had a relatively low density - 30 barrels per | km of the offensive front. In addition, the fighting on July 11 caused a significant consumption of shells, and the lack of vehicles did not allow a quick replenishment of shells.

By noon, the 18th Panzer Corps approached the German positions and, having met strong resistance, went over to the defensive. By 10.30 the 29th Panzer also approached the German positions in the area of the Oktyabrsky state farm, where it was attacked by German aircraft. At 11.00, the Oktyabrsky state farm was taken by a motorized rifle brigade of the 29th Corps, but the Germans immediately returned it during a counterattack. At 1600, the 29th Panzer Corps, which had only 15 tanks left in service, made a last attempt to attack the positions of the Leibstandarte at the Oktyabrsky state farm, but to no avail.

In the combat report of the headquarters of the 29th Panzer Corps, the events of July 12 were described as follows:

air.

This made it possible for the pr-ku to open concentrated fire on the combat formations of the corps and bomb tanks and motorized infantry with impunity, which led to large losses and a decrease in the rate of attack, and this, in turn, made it possible for the pr-ku to conduct more effective artillery fire. Ieria and tanks from the spot. The terrain for the offensive was not favorable due to its ruggedness, the presence of hollows impassable for tanks northwest and southeast of the PROKHOROVKA-BELENIKHINO road forced the tanks to cuddle up to the road and open their flanks, being unable to cover them.

Separate subdivisions that broke ahead, approaching even the svh. KOMSOMOLETS, having suffered heavy losses from artillery fire and tank fire from ambushes, retreated to the line occupied by fire forces.

There was no air cover for the advancing tanks until 1300. From 1300, cover was provided by groups of fighters from 2 to 10 vehicles.

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With the release of tanks to the front line of defense, pr-ka from the forest with / z. GUARD and east. env. GUARD pr-k opened heavy fire from ambushes of "tiger" tanks, self-propelled guns and anti-tank guns. The infantry was cut off from the tanks and forced to lay low. Having broken through into the depths of the defense, the tanks suffered heavy losses.

Parts of the pr-ka, with the support of a large number of aircraft and tanks, launched a counterattack, and parts of the brigade were forced to withdraw. .

During the attack on the forward edge of the pr-ka, self-propelled guns, acting in the first echelon of battle formations of tanks and even breaking ahead of the tanks, had losses from the anti-tank fire of the pr-ka (eleven self-propelled guns were put out of action).

And here is how the same unfortunate attack is recorded in the combat log of the 29th Panzer Corps:

"At the signal of a salvo of the RS 76 regiment, the formations and parts of the corps went on the attack in the directions: overhead. OCTOBER, St. STALINSK. otd., GUARD. (O

The order of battle of the corps is 32 tanks. the brigade is in front, followed by 31st and 25th Tank Brigade, 53th Motorized Rifle Brigade, 271 MP.

At 8:30 am on 12 July 1943, formations and units of the corps launched an offensive in the direction of St. KOMSOMOLETS, x. Black grouse - WINE, POKROVKA.

The attack began without artillery processing of the occupied line by the pr-com and without air cover.

This made it possible for the pr-ku to open concentrated fire on the battle formations of the corps and bomb tanks and motorized infantry with impunity, which led to large losses and a decrease in the rate of attack, and this, in turn, made it possible for the pr-ku to conduct more effective artillery fire. - Ierii and tanks from a place. The terrain for the offensive was not favorable due to its ruggedness, the presence of hollows impassable for tanks northwest and southeast of the PROKHOROVKA-BELENIKHINO road forced the tanks to cuddle up to the road and open their flanks, being unable to cover them.

Despite the strong fire resistance of pr-ka, 32

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Tank Brigade, without losing organization in combat formations in cooperation with 25 Tank Brigade, opened massive fire from tanks, moved forward. When approaching the line: St. OCTOBER,

svh. STALINSK, art. min. fire, where they were forced to gain a foothold on the reached line, gather forces for a further offensive and prepare to repel the attacks of the pr-ka.

Separate subdivisions that broke ahead, approaching even the svh. KOMSOMOLETS, having suffered heavy losses from artillery fire and tank fire from ambushes, retreated to the line occupied by fire forces.

From 11.00 the corps entrenched itself at the reached line: 0.5 km northeast. svh. OCTOBER, 0.5 km north. east svh. STALINSK. otd., 0.5 km south-east. GUARD, reflecting repeated attacks of tanks and infantry of the pr-ka, causing him heavy losses in manpower and equipment.

a) 32 TBr. At 08.30 on 12.7.43, without artillery and aviation processing of the forward edge of the defense of the pr-k, having no exact data on the fire means of the pr-k, the brigade attacked the pr-k in two echelons in the direction of the ref. OCTOBER-SKY, St. KOMSOMOLETS, POKROVKA, along the railway. in a strip up to 900 m. In this (main) direction, the pr-k concentrated a large number of T-6 tanks, FERDINAND self-propelled guns, as well as other anti-tank weapons.

32 TBR was followed by 31 TBR. The attack of the 32nd Tank Brigade proceeded at an exceptionally fast pace. All tanks went on the attack and there was not a single case of indecision or avoidance of battle. TO; 12.00 12.7.43 tank battalions went to the artillery positions of the pr-ka. The infantry began to flee in panic. Seeing the indicated success of the brigade, the pr-k threw the front line of defense up to 150 aircraft, which laid down the infantry of the 533rd Motorized Rifle Brigade, which followed behind the tanks, put several tanks out of action. 31st Brigade, instead of building on the success of 32nd Brigade, continued to stagnate behind. The enemy noticed that the pace of the attack had dropped and brought up fresh tank reserves and infantry. By this time, the brigade had lost up to 40 tanks and 350 personnel and had to stop.

At 16.00 on 12.7.43, the brigade commander assembled tanks and armored

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forces its reserve (total 15 tanks) to attack the temporary storage warehouse. OCTOBER. The attack was not successful because the enemy pulled up enough anti-tank weapons.

The brigade, shielded by its infantry and the infantry of the 53rd Motorized Rifle Brigade in the area of a hollow of 1.5 km svh. OCTOBER, went on the defensive.

6) Z1TBr. At 1.39 am tanks and MSPB brigades took their starting position for the attack | km southwest. BARCHOVKA.

At 8.30, after a signal (a volley of RS), an attack began without artillery preparation and air cover for the advancing tanks and infantry. Raids are carried out in groups of 8 to 37 pieces. type "ME-110" and "Yu-87".

Tanks suffered heavy losses of aviation and art. enemy fire, the brigade attacked in the direction: svh. OCTOBER-SKY through the northwest. env. PROKHOROVKA (Aleksandrovsky). At 10.30 the tanks reached the line of svh. OCTOBER. Further progress was halted by the continuous actions of the aviation of the pr-ka.

There was no air cover for the advancing tanks until 1300. From 1300, cover was provided by groups of fighters from 2 to 10 vehicles.

At 15.40 the avenue launched a counterattack, which was repulsed. As a result of the battles for the day, the brigade has losses: T-34 tanks - 24, T-70 - 20, 45 mm guns - 1, machine. pool. - 1 PSH - 2, rifle - 1, killed - 44 people, wounded - 39, missing - 18 people.

Manpower and equipment of the pr-ka were destroyed and knocked out: small and medium tanks - 21, heavy "tiger" tanks - 6, machine-gun emplacements - 17, up to 600 soldiers of the pr-ka officers.

c) 25 TBr. By order of the corps, at 8.30 am on 12.7.43, the brigade, escorted by a battery of 122 mm self-propelled guns, went on the offensive in the direction: STOROGOE, IVANOVSKY VYSELOK, TETEREVYNO, vys. 228.4 app. env. LUCHKI, h. 246.3, 218.3 with the task of destroying the pr-ka in these areas and by the end of the day concentrate in the KRAPIVENSKE DVOR area with a readiness to act in the direction of the city of BELGOROD.

The guide on the right was advancing 362 TB with a company of automatic

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chikovy MSPB with a battery of 122 mm self-propelled guns, a ledge on the left behind 362 Tb advanced 25 Tb with MSPB without TDR, a battery of 45 mm guns and 76 batteries of self-propelled guns.

With the release of tanks to the front line of defense, pr-ka from the forest with / z. GUARD and east. env. GUARD pr-k opened heavy fire from ambushes of "tiger" tanks, self-propelled guns and anti-tank guns. The infantry was cut off from the tanks and forced to lay low. Having broken through into the depths of the defense, the tanks suffered heavy losses.

Remains of tanks by 10.00. On July 12, 1943, the prka left the depths of the defense and concentrated in a hollow 1.5 km south / to Storozhevoe. By 10.30, the brigade, consisting of the remnants of tanks T-34 - 6, T-70 - 15, took up defense along the bezym slopes. heights 0.6 km south/to STOROGOE. Twice going over to the attack, the pr-k retreated from the line of defense with heavy losses for him.

By the end of the day on July 12, 1943, the brigade had lost 26 T-34 tanks and 24 T-70 tanks, min. - 1, anti-tank guns - 1, personnel: killed - 40 people, wounded - 91 people, missing - 27 people. In total - 158.

During the day of battle on 12.7.43, units of the brigade were destroyed: up to 350 soldiers and officers, small and medium tanks - 2, heavy tanks and "tigers" - 1, self-propelled guns - 2, anti-tank guns - 3, mortars - 2, Art. - 1, hand-gun. - 6, warehouses with fuel and lubricants - 1, trucks with cargo - 4 pcs.

d) 53 MSBR. On July 12, 1943, at 9:00 a.m., the brigade, in cooperation with Z1 and 25th brigade, went on the offensive, and at 11:00 a.m. captured the temporary storage warehouse. STALINSK. dep., svh. OCTOBER, GUARD.

Parts of the avenue, with the support of a large number of aircraft and tanks, launched a counterattack and parts of the brigade were forced to withdraw to the line: a hollow 0.5 km east. svh. OK-TYABRSKY, southeast. env. pits.

e) 1446 SAP. At 3.00 12.7.43, the regiment took up battle formation in the western encirclement. D. BARCHOVKAI supported 25 TBRs with two batteries (1 and 6 batteries), having the task of following on the flanks of the brigade and suppressing firing points during the attack on the front edge of the pr-ka. 2, Zi 5 batteries supported 32 TBRs on the flanks, two batteries and one battery in the center.

The regiment began the attack together with 32 TBri 25 TBri in the area

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svh. STALINSK id. GUARD. During the attack on the forward edge of the pr-ka, self-propelled guns, acting in the first echelon of battle formations of tanks and even breaking ahead of the tanks, had losses from the anti-tank fire of the pr-ka (eleven self-propelled guns were put out of action).

During the attack, the regiment destroyed: T-6 tanks - 1 hit, tanks of different brands - 4, 75 mm guns - 3, anti-tank guns - 23, anti-tank guns - 5, machine guns - 10, self-propelled guns - 1, vehicles - 7, dugouts - 3, bunker - 2 and up to 300 people. infantry.

f) 271st MP - by bringing into battle units of the 53rd Motorized Rifle Brigade, the regiment provided fire support with three divisions to the advancing 1/53rd Motorized Rifle Brigade in the direction of the north-east. edge of the forest that sowing.

GUARD. It should be noted that the entry into the battle was done in a very organized manner, interaction was established with the commanders of the combined arms, following the infantry, the divisions advanced their battle formations forward. Due to a number of reasons, the attack was not crowned with complete success, so it was necessary to take the initial battle formation.

Subsequently, the regiment was assigned a combat mission: to gain a foothold in busy battle formations, to continuously conduct artillery. reconnaissance, to systematize intelligence data, to prevent the possibility of counterattacks by fire, to destroy the allocated fire weapons of the project, to provide fire support to the supported infantry units.

g) 108 IPTAP - supported the attack of tanks. Destroyed 2 anti-tank guns, NP up to an infantry platoon; losses: wounded - 3 people.

The remaining parts of the corps provided the actions of brigades and tanks.

In the battles of July 12, 1943, the corps suffered significant losses.

The task was completed: he stopped the offensive of the pr-ka, laid the foundation for the further defeat of the entire grouping of the pr-ka. The battles on both sides were particularly stubborn, often ending in hand-to-hand combat, tanks, as a rule, did not retreat from the achieved lines, and if the enemy managed to recapture one or another point, then the tankers either died or fought on foot in groups to the last. What is it in

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subsequent battles showed, the pr-k (mainly the "SS" part) began to retreat with heavy battles south southwest.

LOSSES. Corps for 12.7.43 was killed: NS - 72, MNF - 144, a number. - 88, wounded: 75 - NS, MNS - 197, row. - 241, missing NS - 19, MNS - 100, row. - 164, total: NS - 166, MNS - 441, row. — 493.

LOSS MAT. PARTS. Participated in the battle: T-34 - 122, T-70 - 70, SU-122 - 11, SU-76 - 9. Total losses: T-34 - 95, T-70 - 36, SU-122 - 10, SU-76 - 9, of which irrevocable: T-34 - 75, T-70 - 28, SU-122 - 8, SU-76 - 6.

LOSS OF THE ENEMY. Destroyed up to 3260 soldiers and officers by bullets. - 138, guns - 54, tanks - 68, vehicles - 127, motorcycles - 16, aircraft - 2, ammunition depots - 2, minbatteries - 4, art. batteries - 9, mortars - 17".

According to Rotmistrov's order, the 29th Corps was to reach the Pokrovka area, located 25 km from Prokhorovka, by the end of the day. The corps stopped, could not take the Oktyabrsky state farm, located 3 km from Prokhorovka, and the Storozhevoy farm, which was 6 km from Prokhorovka. The assertion contained in the magazine that the 29th Tank Corps "has completed the assigned task" is an obvious poetic exaggeration that has nothing to do with the truth.

The total data on hull losses given in the magazine are, in all likelihood, underestimated. There, for example, it is claimed that a total of 36 T-70 tanks were lost. However, the brigade-by-brigade loss data are given above, from which it follows that the 31st brigade lost 20 T-70s, and the 25th brigade lost 24 T-70s. If we sum up the losses by brigades, we get not 131, but 134 tanks, although the final losses of the 32nd brigade are not given. After inspecting the battlefield, when the Germans had already left, the head of the political department of the 32nd tank brigade, Lieutenant Colonel Trunov, gave updated data on the losses of the brigade: "In total, 7 tanks were hit, 42 tanks were burned, 4 tanks are being repaired. It is not possible to restore burnt tanks, as they have been rendered completely unusable." And in the initial report of July 12

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Rotmistrov showed how 36 burned out and 18 shot down. It follows from this that the actual number of destroyed tanks was 6 more, and the 4 tanks under repair do not belong and, most likely, failed for technical reasons. It is also not very clear from Trunov's report whether all 7 wrecked tanks were subject to restoration, since he further says that only one tank was found on the battlefield to be repaired.

If we assume that the brigade data on T-70 losses are more accurate, then the total number of tanks lost by the 29th Tank Corps should be at least 139 tanks and 19 self-propelled guns, of which at least 103 tanks and 14 self-propelled guns were lost forever.

The picture was no better in the 18th Tank Corps. In his report in the evening [July 2, the commander of the corps, Major General B.S. the Ministry of Regiment, one 75 mm iptap and one 5/7 mm iptap, break the enemy's resistance at the turn of ANDREEVKA, rosha sowing. svh. Komsomolets and destroy him in the area of RED DUBRAVA, BOL. LIGHTHOUSES, KRASNAYA POLYANA and further, turning the front to the north, to ensure the offensive operations of the army to the south.

The beginning of the attack - at 8.30 12.7.43.

I decided: with a blow in the direction of the southern district of VASILYEVKA, high. with elev. 220.4, 252.4, 251.2 - destroy the opposing enemy in three-echelon combat formation.

1st combat echelon in line - 181, 170 brigade to attack the enemy in the corps zone with the immediate task of capturing the MAL. LIGHTHOUSES, in the future - go to the line:

18] tbr - high. 251.5, KRASNAYA POLYANA.

170 tbr - (excl.) KRASNAYA POLYANA, RED OAK.

2nd echelon - 32 MSBR with an artillery group consisting of:

292 Minpolk, 76 mm iptap, 57 mm iptap - advance behind

first echelon. By the end of the day, change the defense of 181 and 170 Tbr.

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36th Guards Troop - to advance behind 170 tank brigade in the second echelon, ensuring the right flank of the corps' battle order. Focus on the river. DRY.

3rd echelon - 110 brigade, reconnaissance detachment - to reach the area by the end of the day. 251.2.

Shtakor - in the third echelon between 110 brigade and reconnaissance detachment. |

At 8.30, the corps went on the offensive.

Enemy SS Panzer Divisions "Adolf Hitler", "Dead Head" and "Reich", which arrived at the front on 10.7 from KHARKOV, where they were replenished for 3 months with materiel and personnel (according to the testimony of prisoners, the divisions had 268 tanks and 44 armored personnel carriers each) in order to develop success in the direction of the city of KURSK, putting up stubborn resistance, began to retreat in the direction of el. 217.9, St. KOMSOMOLETS.

Enemy artillery fired intensively at the battle formations of the corps from the GREZNOE area, svh. KOMSO-MOLETS.

The corps, not having proper support in fighter aviation and suffering heavy losses from artillery fire and intense bombardment from the air (by 12.00, enemy aircraft had made up to 1500 sorties), slowly moved forward.

The terrain in the zone of action of the corps is crossed by three deep ravines, passing from the left bank of the river. PSEL to the railway BELENIKHINO - PROKHOROVKA, why the tank brigades advancing in the first echelon 181, 170 were forced to act on the left flank of the corps zone near a strong enemy stronghold svh. OCTOBER. 170 brigade, operating on the left flank, by 12.00 lost up to 60% of its combat materiel.

Despite the losses, overcoming the fire resistance of the enemy, parts of the corps, having taken over. OCTOBER, by 12.00 they were fighting at the turn: 181 brigade - ANDREEVKA, high. 241.6, 170 brigade - ravine southeast. MIKHAILOVKA, 32 MSBR - fought for ANDREEVKA.

Continuing to fulfill the task, parts of the core

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Pusa by the end of the day reached the boundary of 200 m east. church of BOGORODITSKOE, south. env. VASILYEVKA, ANDREEVKA, two windmills PLESTNOE and further along the sowing. slope of the ravine in the southeastern ANDREEVKA, svh. OCTOBER.

By the end of the day, from the KOZLOVKA, GREZNOE area, the enemy launched a frontal tank attack with a simultaneous attempt to bypass the battle formations of the corps units from the direction of KOZLOVKA, POLEGHAEV, using their "tiger" tanks and self-propelled guns, intensively bombarding the battle formations from air.

Fulfilling the assigned task, the 18th TC encountered a well-organized, strong anti-tank defense of the enemy with pre-buried tanks and assault guns at the line of heights 217.9, 241.6.

In order to avoid unnecessary losses in personnel and equipment, by my order No. 68, parts of the corps went on the defensive at the achieved lines.

In fact, the Oktyabrsky state farm could not be held by the 18th Tank Corps. Also, the losses of the 170th Tank Brigade were significantly underestimated, all 65 vehicles of which were disabled, most of them irretrievably. The brigade actually ceased to exist. This is proved by the fact that it is not in the list of units of the 18th Panzer Corps at 0300 on 13 July. In the report, the headquarters of the corps reported:

"1. The enemy during the day of 12.7.43, after stubborn fighting, left the settlement of YAMKI, svh. OCTOBER, St. KOMSOMOLETS, rosha zap. TETEREVYNO, then made a frontal tank counterattack and an attempt to bypass in the direction of KOZLOVKA, Polezhaev, using his "tiger" tanks and self-propelled guns.

2. Fulfilling the assigned task of the day - access to the Belgorod highway, 18th shopping mall unexpectedly stumbled upon well-organized, strong enemy resistance, with tanks and assault guns dug in advance at the turn of high. 217.9, 241.6.

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3. According to preliminary data, the corps suffered losses in motorized infantry up to 20%, in tanks up to 30%.

In the battle today, 8 people were out of action. senior command, commanding staff:

1. Corps engineer lieutenant colonel comrade BELOV - killed.

2. Commander of the 170th Brigade Lieutenant Colonel Comrade Tarasov - killed.

3. Commander of the 1st battalion of the 170th brigade captain ISAEV - died of wounds.

4. Commander | Major GHARIBYAN of the battalion of the 181st brigade was wounded.

5. The commander of the 2nd battalion of the 181st brigade, captain SKRIPKIN, was wounded.
6. Deputy commander of the 181st brigade, major GRIGORYANTS - wounded.
7. Head of the Operational Department of Shtakor, Lieutenant Colonel MARTIROSOV - wounded.
8. Commander of the 414th engineer battalion - wounded.

Tank losses: T-34 - 25

T-70 - 15

Churchill - 15

The losses inflicted on the enemy are being specified.

KP - south. env. Coastal.

Considering that the 170th tank brigade: is completely out of action, the data on losses - only 55 tanks - seem to be significantly underestimated. Former deputy commander of the tank battalion of the 181st tank brigade, senior lieutenant E.V. Shkurdalov (later Colonel and Hero of the Soviet Union) recalled: "The 170th Tank Brigade was ahead of us. This brigade burned down in just five minutes – 65 vehicles". The former commander of a tank platoon, Illarionov, writes about the same thing: "60 vehicles of Lieutenant Colonel Tarasov rushed this morning to the Prokhorov field, and every single one, led by the commander, burned down in the oncoming battle."

In all likelihood, the above data on the losses of the 18th and 29th corps are significantly underestimated relative to irretrievable losses. In the report of the headquarters of the 5th Guards Tank Army on the losses of armored vehicles in the period from July 11 to July 14 (almost all of it died on July 12, at the entrance of the Prokhorov battle), for the 18th tank corps without

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return losses are determined at 30 tanks, and 98 tanks are shown left on the battlefield. Of these latter, only 21 vehicles are listed as evacuated. Since the battlefield was controlled by the Germans, there can be no doubt that by the time they retreated from Prokhorovka, almost all the Soviet tanks that had not been evacuated by July 14 had been destroyed. Therefore, the irretrievable losses [of the 8th Panzer Corps, which did not participate in the battles for several days after July 12, can be determined as approximately equal to 77 tanks.

The same picture for the losses of the 29th tank corps. Here, 154 tanks, 8 SU-122s and 6 SU-76s are considered irretrievably lost by July 14. It should be noted that the number of irretrievably lost tanks increased by 51 units compared to the initial report, from 103 to 154. On the other hand, the number of irretrievably lost self-propelled guns decreased from 19 to 14. But 199 tanks, 10 SU-122 and 9 SU-76. The coincidence of the number of self-propelled guns left on the battlefield with the total number of losses of self-propelled guns in the report of July 12 - [9 units, proves that we are talking about armored vehicles that were lost precisely on July 12. Of all the tanks and self-propelled guns left on the battlefield, only 2 SU-122s were shown to be evacuated. Thus, the irretrievable losses of the 29th Panzer Corps for July 12 can be estimated as approximately equal to 199 tanks and 19 self-propelled guns.

The total irretrievable losses in the armored vehicles of the 18th and 29th tank corps in the Prokhorov battle on July 12, 1943 can be determined as approximately equal to 276 tanks and 19 self-propelled guns. This is also more than the number of Soviet tanks declared as destroyed on July 12 by the headquarters of the I SS Panzer Corps - 249. The Germans did not consider self-propelled guns as tanks and did not take them into account in this case. And this is against Ztankov and, presumably, 1 Marder self-propelled guns, irretrievably lost by the SS Panzer Corps on July 12. In terms of irretrievable losses, even without taking into account the losses of the 2nd Tank Corps and the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, the ratio is close to 74:1. Probably, the military talents of Hausser and Rotmistrov were roughly related in the same way.

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In the Trufanov group, which did not fight directly against the SS corps, during the same period, by the end of July 14, 29 tanks were irretrievably lost, and 37 were left on the battlefield, and there were no evacuated vehicles. Probably, the true irretrievable losses of Trufanov's group amounted to 37 tanks. Gogda, the total irretrievable losses of Rotmistrov's army (excluding the 2nd Tank and 2nd Guards Tank Corps) for July 12 and 13 (Trufanov's group, in contrast to the 18th and 29th Tank Corps, on July 13 was also in combat) can be estimated at 313 tanks and [19 self-propelled guns. If we add here the irretrievable losses of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps (29 burned out, 35 knocked out) and the 2nd Tank Corps (11 burned out, [1 knocked out]), then the irretrievable losses of the 5th Guards Tank Army will increase to at least 353 tanks and 19 self-propelled guns.

There are other estimates of the losses of Soviet armored vehicles, but they seem to us to be somewhat underestimated. So, according to the calculations of L.N. Lopukhovsky, taking into account the losses of the 11th and 12th mechanized brigades of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps during the day of the battle, starting from 8.30 on July 12, the irretrievable losses of the 5th Guards Tank Army, according to the reports of the formations, they amounted to 223 tanks and self-propelled guns. In total, on July 12, the army could irretrievably lose about 230-235 tanks and self-propelled guns. By 13:00 on July 13, out of the available 860 combat-ready tanks and self-propelled guns, 390 remained in service, the loss amounted to 470 vehicles. By this time, according to Lopukhovsky, repairmen could evacuate and restore 30-40 combat vehicles from the battlefield. Then the total losses of the tank army for July 12 destroyed and knocked out could be at least 500 tanks and self-propelled guns, that is, 58% of the number of combat-ready and 75% of the 670 who took a direct part in the battle. The same assessment was made in 1998 by employees of the Russian Institute of Military History.

The evacuation and repair service in the Soviet tank troops was put very badly, which Rotmistrov complained about in a letter to Zhukov. And when the Soviet repairmen came to the territory left by the Germans,

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where the main forces of the 5th Guards Tank Army died, they managed to find only one wrecked Soviet tank that could be repaired,

The combat log of the 5th Guards Army recorded the following decision by A. S. Zhadov on July 2, 1943, and described the course of the Prokhorov battle as follows:

"In connection with the strike on the morning of 12.7 by the 5th Guards Tank Army on the left flank of the 5th Guards Army in the general direction of SMART, POKROVKA, the commander of the 5th Guards Army also decides to strike not with the right, as expected, but with the left flank .

33 Guards. The commander of the rifle corps ordered, using the blow of the tanks, a decisive offensive in the general direction towards the BOL. LIGHTHOUSES in cooperation with 32 Guards. with a rifle corps and tanks to destroy the enemy standing here.

The corps was supposed to strike the main blow with five divisions (97th, 95th, 42nd, 52nd Guards Rifle Division and 9th Guards Airborne Division), built in one echelon, having the necessary reinforcement on the left flank of the corps.

The next task of the corps:

Exit to the GREZNOE area, MAL. LIGHTHOUSES, BLACK BLACK WINE, svh. KOMSOMOLETS.

The subsequent task of the corps:

Exit to the area POGORELOVKA, YAKOVLEVO, elev. 246.

Located in the army reserve of the 6th Guards. VDD by the morning of 12.7.43, concentrate in the SREDOLSHCHANKA area, vys. 243.5, OSTRENNKY, having the task, if necessary, to turn around in the general direction of PETROVKA, VASILYEVKA, GREZNOE.

At 8.30 12.7 43, the 5th Guards Army along the entire front was to launch a decisive offensive against the BOL. LIGHTHOUSES, inflicting the main blow with their left flank.

Trying to keep the initiative in his hands, the enemy offered stubborn fire resistance to the advancing units of the army on the entire front. His infantry, with the support of tanks in several places, repeatedly went over to the counterattack ...

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On the left flank of the army, on the front of the 33rd Guards. The enemy SC, ahead of us, itself at 6.00 after a short artillery, mortar raid and massive air strikes from the air, went on the offensive in the Klyuchi sector in the directions of Vesely and Polezhaev. Here the enemy had in mind to develop the success of his offensive operations by bringing into battle up to 60 tanks, including about a dozen "tigers". The tanks were followed by machine gunners, about 200 motorcyclists, self-propelled guns and up to one and a half infantry battalions. In other sectors of the 33rd Guards SK, the enemy offered stubborn resistance to our advancing units.

The 97th Guards Rifle Division, after a short artillery raid at 8.30, broke through the enemy defenses with an active attack and at 9.00 reached the borders of the south. elev. 188.1 ILYINSKY. By 12.00 the division advanced to the southeastern outskirts of KOCHETOVKA, RED OCTOBER, and by 19.00 it reached the line of elevation 209.3, sowing part of the ravine KOCHETOVKA. The enemy launched two unsuccessful counterattacks against the 97th Guards Rifle Division with infantry supported by about a dozen tanks.

In the center, up to 100 enemy tanks, having broken through the defenses of the 95th and 52nd Guards Rifle Divisions in the Klyuchi area and at elevation 226.6, began to spread rapidly in the direction: MERRY, elevation. 236.7 and POLEZHAEV, threatening the left flank of the 97th Guards Rifle Division and the right flank of the 42nd Guards Rifle Division, which by this time was advancing on MIKHAILOVKA, ANDREEVKA and High 241.6. Around 19.00, individual enemy tanks reached the ravine east of Vesely, reached the southern slopes of height 236.7 and the northern outskirts of Polezhaev. The retreating units of the 95th and 52nd Guards Rifle Divisions held back the advance of enemy tanks at this line. In addition, in order to counter the further development of the offensive of enemy tanks, on the orders of the army commander, the commander of the 32nd Guards Rifle Division threw 1322 IPTALP (supporting the 66th Guards Rifle Division) into the NIZH.OLSHANKA area to cover the direction to the border guard.OLSHANKA.

The 9th Guards Airborne Division, overcoming the stubborn resistance of the enemy, by 22.00 reached the line: mark 241.6 southwest. the outskirts of the forest this height, north-east. env. GUARD.

Stubborn, fierce battles unfolded on July 12 on

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all fronts of the army. If on both flanks of the army some of our success was indicated and there was, albeit insignificant, advance forward, then almost in the very center the enemy, breaking through our front of defense, was successful in trying to develop the offensive ... "

In fact, it is recognized here that the battle of Prokhorovka as a whole ended in failure for the 5th Guards Army. It had only a small advance on the flanks, which had no operational significance, while the SS broke through the central armies and penetrated deep into the defenses.

On the basis of Soviet and German documents and memoirs of the participants, such a picture of the Prokhorov tank battle itself is drawn, in which the Leibstandarte opposed two Soviet tank corps. At 8:00 am on July 12, Soviet artillery preparation began, which, according to various sources, lasted from 15 to 30 minutes. Its effectiveness was extremely low due to the low density of artillery, the meager supply of shells and the complete lack of reconnaissance of targets. Not only failed to suppress enemy positions, but also inflicted any tangible damage on the enemy. The Germans, it seems, did not understand at all that they were dealing with artillery preparation before a major tank counteroffensive, mistaking it for an ordinary artillery raid. Moreover, the morning was cloudy and rainy and Soviet aviation did not

could provide support to its troops. Unlike the Luftwaffe, the Soviet Air Force was much more dependent on the weather, both because of the lower level of pilot training and because of a number of organizational problems. At 8.30 in the morning, the 29th and 18th tank corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army went on the attack, but only by 11.00 did they reach the positions of the Leibstandarte. The 29th tank corps, consisting of the 25th, 31st and 32nd tank brigades and the 1446th self-propelled artillery regiment advancing behind them, advanced directly from the Prokhorovka station on both sides of the railway and along it, in a 3.5 km strip between the state farm "Oktyabrsky" and the Yamka farm. The 18th Tank Corps launched the 181st and 170th Tank Brigades and the 36th Guards Separate Heavy Tank Regiment in the first echelon, followed a little behind by

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32nd motorized rifle brigade, followed by the 10th tank brigade. This corps advanced to the right of the 29th Tank Corps, in a 2.5 km wide strip between the Oktyabrsky state farm and the Psjol River. All these forces were advancing on the positions of the Adolf Hitler division. The Germans did not expect such a large-scale offensive, but quickly got their bearings when the motorized infantry reported that the Russians heard a strong noise of tank engines, which means that the Russians had a lot of tanks on the front line. The command of the division wanted to return Ribbentrop's company sent to the attack, but he refused, so as not to abandon the infantrymen who had already gone on the attack, and found himself right in front of the Soviet tank armada. As a result, Ribbentrop's company suffered the largest irretrievable losses, amounting to at least half of all irretrievable losses in the armored vehicles of the SS corps for that day. But there is no evil without good. Ribbentrop's tank managed to wedge into the randomly advancing wave of Soviet tanks and destroyed 4 of them, shooting them almost point-blank. The remaining tanks, anti-tank guns, assault guns and self-propelled guns of the Leibstandarte shot the attackers from a spot and from a fairly large distance, hiding behind an anti-tank ditch. At this distance, they were practically invulnerable to Soviet tank guns. In addition, Soviet tank crews, blindly following Stalin's orders, fired mainly on the move, which ruled out aimed fire. The Germans made full use of the advantage of the modernized T-4s and a few "tigers" over the T-34s in terms of muzzle velocity and sights. The Soviet command failed to use the advantages inherent in the "thirty-four". They consisted in the ability to maneuver and in a higher speed of movement over rough terrain. To use these advantages, competent tank commanders and well-trained driver mechanics were required. There were almost none in the Red Army. At that time, the overwhelming majority of Soviet driver-mechanics, before going into battle, had the practice of driving no more than 5 engine hours, while in order to confidently drive a tank, it was necessary to practice at least 25 engine hours.

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owls. The main thing that worried such inexperienced tankers was to keep up with the commander's tank. And in order to respond to enemy threats, there was no time left. This is one of the reasons why Ribbentrop's tank was never identified near Prokhorovka.

The tank brigades of the Soviet 29th Tank Corps covered only 1.5-2 km in the first two hours of the offensive. Only 15 T-34 tanks of the 1st battalion of the 32nd tank brigade under the command of Major P.S. 6 and break into the Komsomolets state farm. Ivanov's detachment deeper than all units of the 5th Guards Tank Army wedged that day into the German defense of the enemy - by as much as 5 km. The other tanks of the 32nd Tank Brigade by 11:00 a.m. managed to overcome only 3 km from the positions from which they attacked, and the main part of this distance fell on the neutral zone between the Soviet and German positions. Ts. A. Rotmistrov tried to send his reserve to the Komsomolets state farm - two brigades of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps, but the artillery of the Life Standard opened a powerful barrage, and then aviation attacked the advancing brigades. The attack of the units of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps took a sip before it began. As a result, units 32-

th Tank Brigade and the 53rd Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 29th Tank Corps were almost completely destroyed, and the real hero of the Prokhorovka battle, Major P.S. Ivanov, burned down in the tank. Only one tank battalion survived from the 25th tank brigade of the 29th tank corps, which withdrew and took up defensive positions half a kilometer southeast of the Storozhevoye farm.

The strike of the Soviet 18th Panzer Corps was just as disastrous as that of the 29th Panzer Corps. It was applied end-to-end between the left flank of the Leibstandarte and the right flank of the Totenkopf in the area of the villages of Bogoroditskoye and Kozlovka, on the bank of Psel. Here the 18th Panzer Corps could meet 30-40 tanks of the Totenkopf Panzer Regiment and an assault battery.

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out guns, but the Soviet tanks dodged towards the positions of the Leibstandarte. The 170th tank brigade of the 18th tank corps tried at high speed to go around the Oktyabrsky state farm on the left, but came under fire from tanks and assault guns of the Leibstandarte. The 181st tank brigade of the 18th tank corps managed to get to the first line of the German defense at heights 231.3 and 241.6, where it was stopped with heavy losses. The Soviet counteroffensive failed completely. |

At 1300, the remnants of the 32nd and 31st Tank Brigades of the 29th Tank Corps, the 170th and 181st Tank Brigades of the 18th Tank Corps, supported by the 42nd Guards Rifle and 9th Guards Airborne Divisions managed to occupy the Oktyabrsky state farm, where they were fired upon and bombed by Soviet attack aircraft. Even more powerful was the raid of hundreds of German aircraft. At 2:30 p.m., the 36th Guards Separate Heavy Tank Regiment, using 18 Mk-4 Churchill tanks, tried to take Andreevka and Vasilievka near the Psel River at the junction of the Keleybshtandart and Totenkopf, but failed. In the afternoon, the Totenkopf units, crushing the defenses of the 52nd Guards Rifle Division of the 6th Guards Army and the 95th Guards Rifle Division of the 5th Guards Army, occupied the Polezhaev farm and the high western bank of the Psel, with - second flanking fire shot through the battle formations of the 18th tank corps. His 110th and 181st tank brigades were forced to retreat.

Hausser himself spoke rather sparingly about the Battle of Prokhorov in his memoirs. He pointed out that "from the very beginning it was known that the Soviet command had a strong operational reserve in the Voronezh region. Some of these troops were sent into battle. SS Corps on the night of 11 July was put on alert for a general offensive against these troops, while the division "Dead Head" was supposed to capture the crossings over Psel and provide us with cover. On these initial positions [On July 1, the 3rd Soviet Tank Army launched a counterattack (here Hausser suffered a slight memory aberration. In fact, the counterattack was not the 3rd Tank Army, but the 5th Guards Tank Army).

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army, and not on the 11th, but on July 12th. - B.S.). On this and the following days, a tank battle unfolded to the west of Prokhorovka on an unprecedented scale. The enemy could not break through, many of his tanks were destroyed. However, the situation became critical, since the army group "Kempf" was forced to transfer its main forces from the left flank to the right, so that a large gap formed next to the SS easel corps.

The successes of the 9th Army of the Model, advancing in the Oryol direction, were much more modest; The Soviet attack on Orel raised the question of reaching Kursk. In addition, it seemed that the situation on the Miussky front had become aggravated. Therefore, the High Command ordered to stop the offensive and transferred the SS corps to the Mius. Thus, the operational goals were not achieved, but at least the operational reserves of the enemy were tied up. Whether his plans were thereby frustrated is a moot point, as well as whether it was worth using and depleting our reserves for this offensive.

In the battle near Prokhorovka on July 12, the largest irretrievable losses in armored vehicles were suffered by the 6th tank company of the Leibstandarte, which suffered the main blow of the Soviet tank

armals. This company was commanded by the son of the Reich Foreign Minister Rudolf von Ribbentrop. On the morning of July 12, he was awakened by a messenger: "Obersturmführer, you are ordered to come to the commander!" Von Ribbentrop immediately jumped up. On the way to the battalion headquarters, he managed to notice that the front was restless. Hearing the noise of an approaching motorcycle, the commander of the tank battalion, Sturmbannführer Gross, leaned out of the headquarters car - a converted mobile radio station. "Listen, Ribbentrop. The infantry reports that the Russians are bringing up tanks. No details. Establish contact with the infantry and be ready to fight if necessary.

Ribbentrop later recalled this day in great detail. Probably, this day became the most memorable day of his life. For the feat accomplished on the Prokhorovsky field,

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the son of the Reich Minister was awarded the Knight's Cross. Here is what Rudolf Ribbentrop wrote about July 12, 1943:

"Judging by the tone of the battalion commander, it was to be expected that the development of the offensive, which resulted in one continuous tank battle, would continue to lead to tank battles. Moreover, he pointed it out quite clearly.

At first, I was a little uneasy about such a vague and unusual order, since Gross had said the previous evening that my company would be kept in reserve. And now it is a task that so inopportunistically interrupted the rest, which we really needed.

I returned to the location of the company on the passenger seat of a motorcycle and ordered the crews to warm up the tank engines and get ready to move out. The guns were uncovered and prepared for battle. Then I ordered Sturmscharführer Gebauer, who was in charge of the company headquarters, to come to me on a motorcycle with a sidecar. I was going to personally visit the positions of the infantry in order to assess the situation and be able to immediately take the necessary measures if necessary.

The losses of my company by this day were high. Of the twenty-two tanks with which we began the operation on July 5, on the evening of July 11, only seven remained in service. Fortunately, not all lost tanks were completely destroyed, and repaired T-4s were constantly returning to the gate.

The day before, we crossed an anti-tank ditch dug by the Russians. There, the position was occupied by two other companies of our battalion, while we remained in reserve.

Through the anti-tank ditch, which crossed almost the entire offensive front, there was only one crossing, along which the road to Prokhorovka went. Mosttoli was not blown up, or it has already been restored. The ditch was in a low place. From there, in the direction of Prokhorovka, there was a slope about 400 meters wide. On the right, the slope was limited by the road to Prokhorovka. Behind it was an overgrown railway embankment, which could be considered impregnable for tanks.

At the embankment, the front line bent over the anti-tank ditch and then went east to the very demarcation line.

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between us and our neighbors - the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich".

A battalion of our motorized infantry captured the embankment, and the second battalion took up positions at right angles to it above the mentioned slope.

The frontal flank was open, and there was no contact with our troops from this side (that is, with units of the 3rd SS Totenkopf division. - RB.S.). I drove along the road along the embankment until I reached the command post of the battalion commander, equipped in the passage under the embankment. The commander understood

interrogate a captured Russian lieutenant. The lieutenant looked very much like a German—tall, fair-haired, and blue-eyed. He behaved very reservedly and almost did not answer questions. Later, after receiving a few cigarettes, he declared: "The Russian soldier is a bad feeder and an excellent fighting spirit. German soldier - excellent feeding and low morale.

I didn't learn much from the motorized infantry commander. He, too, received reports of tank noises, but other than that, he heard nothing else.

I left a non-commissioned officer with a motorcycle at the battalion command post so that he could quickly inform me if anything happened and give instructions on further actions.

I returned on foot to the tanks that were visible below at the anti-tank ditch a few hundred meters away. The personnel and equipment of the battle group, which consisted of our division's assault gun battalion and Jochen Peiper's armored personnel carrier battalion, were scattered all over the slope. There were so many people and equipment on this slope, hidden from the eyes of the Russians, that it seemed to be strewn with all kinds of equipment and weapons. All parts enjoyed the respite that presented itself. The day before, the attack on Prokhorovka was cancelled. Success was thrillingly close, but the 2nd SS division on the right and the 3rd SS division on the left could not keep up with us. We had no contact with them, and the Russians fell on them with large forces.

As a result, our troops formed a wedge, deeply protruding into enemy territory. Our right flank was

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reliably covered by an embankment, and the left one - on the Psyol River - was completely open.

Due to the lack of contact with the neighbors, the attack on Prokhorovka was impossible. Accordingly, our soldiers slept like a dead sleep. In any case, seven days of the heaviest fighting in the entire campaign in Russia are behind us.

As for me, I considered lack of sleep the main deprivation of wartime, much worse than hunger, thirst, cold, rain and dampness.

On the way back, I clearly understood that the front was restless. Artillery rumbled here and there. Above us echoed the echo of machine-gun fire, and the sky was full of planes.

Von Ribbentrop returned to his company positions and immediately received a mug of hot coffee. The tank loader opened the box of rations and handed the commander a piece of bread. The deputy company commander reported that the 6th company was ready to move. The soldiers enjoyed the morning freshness and coolness. This morning there were only 6 combat-ready tanks in the company.

Earlier, Ribbentrop's company had suffered heavy losses, breaking through the Soviet anti-tank defenses together with Peiper's battalion.

Already leading his men into the anti-tank positions along with Peiper's motorized riflemen, von Ribbentrop received another order from the battalion commander canceling the attack. However, the company commander did not carry it out. Deploy the machine now meant to provide Peiper alone to storm enemy positions. In front of the Soviet tank armada, the signs of which were visible already in the morning, Peiper's armored personnel carriers would have been doomed to destruction, since their thin armor was easily penetrated by the fire of Soviet tank guns. At that moment, Ribbentrop knew nothing about the advance of Soviet tanks. But he was well aware that without the support of tanks, the armored personnel carriers of Peiper's battalion would fall victim to the fire of Soviet anti-tank guns, which were located in large numbers in positions in front of the railway line.

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in bulk. R. von Ribbentrop later described his state of mind in the following way: "I understood only one thing - this is out of the question. I took part in the attack, despite the angry objections of the battalion commander coming over the radio.

Having assembled a company after the destruction of the anti-tank defense zone and the destruction of the last anti-tank gun, I received from Peiper the highest praise that I have ever received during the entire war. He told me: "I would gladly accept you and your company into my battalion."

Upon returning to the battalion, I managed to convince the angry commander that it would be impossible to stop the attack and leave the armored personnel carriers facing the front with anti-tank guns without the support of tanks."

But before the explanation with Sturmbannführer Martin Gross, commander of the 2nd tank battalion, it was still far away. Sipping hot coffee in small sips, von Ribbentrop accidentally turned towards the front line. The picture that appeared before him at first seemed to him a hallucination. The air was a solid purple wall of smoke from smoke bombs. It meant: "Enemy tanks This signal was visible along the entire crest of the slope. Terrible purple signs were visible to the right, by the embankment. It immediately became clear: behind the hill, far from the eyes of those who were in the valley, a mass of Soviet tanks was advancing.

Von Ribbentrop threw down the mug and commanded: "Crank it up! Behind me!" Then he turned to his deputy Malkhov: "We will go up the slope in a deployed formation. You and your platoon will go to the left, I with the other three tanks - in the center and on the right. Slightly bend the left flank back in case we are bypassed. We go out on the slope to a half-closed position and from it we hit the Russians!

Let us turn again to the text of von Ribbentrop's memoirs:

"On that same day, I noticed the commander of the company control department, whom I left at the command post of the infantry battalion. Enveloped in a huge cloud of dust, he rushed at full speed

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riding a motorcycle down a hill, constantly holding a raised fist up: "Move out immediately!"

The company immediately began to move and dispersed along the slope, as if on exercises. The deployment was carried out so clearly that my heart began to beat faster. The realization that I was leading these young but experienced soldiers into battle inspired me.

Having reached the crest of the hill, we saw another low crest about two hundred meters away, on the other side of a small depression, on which, apparently, our infantry occupied positions.

By radio, I ordered the company to take up positions on the new ridge and fight there. The lowland went to the left, and, going down the front slope, we noticed the first Russian T-34s. They seemed to be trying to get around us on the left.

We stopped on a slope and opened fire, knocking out several enemy vehicles. Several Russian tanks were left to burn out. For a good gunner, a distance of 800 meters was ideal.

As we waited for more tanks to appear, I looked around out of habit. What I saw left me speechless. Fifteen, then thirty, then forty tanks appeared from behind a low hillock 150-200 meters wide. Finally I lost count. T-34s were moving towards us at high speed with armored infantrymen.

My driver-mechanic Schüle reported on the intercom: "Commander, on the right! On right! Do you see them?"

I have seen them very well. At that moment, the thought flashed: "Now - the lid! It seemed to the driver that I said: "Leave the tank!", and he began to open the hatch. I grabbed him rather roughly and dragged him back into the tank. At the same time, I kicked the gunner in the right side - this was the signal to turn the turret to the right.

Soon the first shell went to the target, and after hitting the T-34 flared up. He was only 50-70 meters away from us. At the same moment next to my tank was hit and caught fire. I saw Unterscharführer Parke leave the car,

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but we never saw him again. His neighbor on the right was also shot down and was soon engulfed in flames as well.

An avalanche of enemy tanks rolled straight at us. Tank after tank! Wave after wave! Such a number of them was simply incredible, and they all moved at high speed.

We didn't have time to take up defensive positions. All we could do was shoot. From this distance, every shot hit the target. When are we destined to get a direct hit? Somewhere in my subconscious, I realized that there was no chance of salvation. As always in such situations, we could only take care of the most urgent. And so we knocked out the third, then the fourth T-34 from distances of less than thirty meters.

In our T-4s, the loader had about 18-20 shells at hand, of which most were high-explosive fragmentation and only a part were armor-piercing.

Soon my loader shouted: "Armor-piercing finishes!"

All of our ammunition, ready for immediate use, was used up. Further, the shells were to be fed to the loader by the gunner, radio operator and driver. To remain motionless at that moment would surely mean detection and destruction by Russian tanks. The only hope for us is to get over the ridge, although the Russians have already overcome it. There, our chances of salvation were higher than here, where we were in full view.

We turned around in the middle of the mass of Russian tanks and drove back about fifty meters, onto the reverse slope of the first ridge. Here, having found ourselves in a slightly more reliable shelter, we again turned around to face the enemy tanks.

And at that moment, about thirty meters to the right of us, the T-34 stopped. I saw the tank rock slightly on its suspension and turn the turret in our direction.

I looked straight into the barrel of his gun. We could not fire immediately, because the gunner had just given the loader a new projectile.

"Press! Let's!" I shouted into the microphone. My driver-mechanic Schüle was the best in the battalion. He immediately turned on

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transmission, and the clumsy T-4 pulled away. We passed the T-34 in some five meters. The Russian tried to deploy the tower after us, but he did not succeed. We stopped ten meters behind the stationary T-34 and turned around. My gunner hit the turret of a Russian tank directly. The T-34 exploded, and its turret flew three meters into the air, almost hitting the barrel of my gun. All this time, new T-34s with troops on armor were rushing around us one after another.

In the meantime, I tried to drag inside the flag with a swastika, fixed on top in the stern of the tank. The flag was needed so that our pilots could see where we were. I was only halfway done, and now the flag was fluttering in the wind. One of the Russian gunner commanders, sooner or later, should have paid attention to him. A fatal hit was only a matter of time for us.

We had only one chance: we had to constantly move.

A stationary tank was immediately recognized by the enemy as an enemy tank, since all Russian tanks were moving at high speed.

On top of that, we could still be knocked out by our own tanks, dispersed along a wide front below, along the anti-tank ditch near the railway embankment. They opened fire on the advancing enemy tanks. On the battlefield shrouded in smoke and dust, looking against the sun, it was impossible to distinguish the tanks from the Russians. I constantly broadcast our call sign: "Attention everyone! It's Kunibert! We are in the middle of Russian tanks! Don't shoot at us

There was no answer. In the meantime, the Russians set fire to several vehicles, passing through Peiper's battalion and our artillery battalion. But by this time, the fire of our two remaining tank companies had already begun to show. Peiper's assault gun battalion and motorized infantry (the latter with melee weapons) also inflicted damage on the tanks and pinned down the Russian infantrymen who had jumped off the T-34 and tried to advance on foot. Over the battlefield

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a thick veil of smoke and dust settled. More and more groups of Russian tanks continued to roll out of this hell. On a wide slope they were shot by our tanks.

The whole field was a hodgepodge of broken tanks and vehicles. Without a doubt, we partly owe our salvation to this very circumstance - the Russians did not notice us.

Suddenly, ahead of me, I saw a dense mass of Russian infantry and ordered the driver: "Turn a little to the left!"

A few seconds later, he noticed them too. Firing from machine guns, we crashed into a mass of infantry from the rear. They did not even realize that a German tank was catching up with them.

Our salvation lay in moving to the left, in the direction of the road. Gam we had to meet our infantry and break away from the Russian tanks.

Meanwhile, the rest of the crew - the driver, radio operator and gunner - collected armor-piercing shells throughout the tank. As soon as such a projectile was located, we immediately knocked out another one of the T-34s, which caught up with us after we stopped. Incredibly, we still haven't been shot at. All experts are sure that this happened because the Russians did not have a separate tank commander - the tanks were commanded by gunners who could only look in the direction where their gun was deployed. If not for this, we would be doomed.

To our displeasure, the Russians also moved to the left towards the road to cross the anti-tank ditch there. We never understood why the Russians directed their attack through an area blocked by an anti-tank ditch, the existence of which they certainly knew. Because of this obstacle, they must have inevitably lost momentum in the offensive, having traveled only a kilometer. Therefore, the Russians turned left to go to the road and cross the moat on the bridge. However, an incredible scene unfolded there.

At the repaired bridge across the anti-tank ditch, the advancing enemy was met by the fire of our tanks and anti-tank guns. I managed to cover my tank behind

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7- Sokolov

downed T-34. From there we entered into battle with enemy tanks. They were moving towards the bridge from all directions. So it was even easier for our battalion and us to choose targets.

Burning T-34s collided with each other. Everywhere there were fires and smoke, shells and explosions. The T-34s were on fire, and the wounded tried to crawl away.

Soon the entire slope was littered with burning enemy tanks. We remained behind the smoking carcass of the enemy machine. And then I heard the voice of my loader: "There are no more armor-piercing

We used up the entire ammunition load of armor-piercing shells. Now we were left with only high-explosive fragmentation shells, useless against well-armored T-34s.

Now we are engaged in the destruction of the Soviet infantry. It was not easy, because the Russian infantry got to our positions, and we could accidentally hit one of our own self-propelled guns or an armored personnel carrier from Peiper's battalion.

At first I didn't shoot. Then I heard the gunner scream. He groaned, "My eye! My eye"

A stray shell hit the turret exactly in a small hole for the gunner's sight. The shell did not penetrate the armor, but nevertheless went deep enough to drive the sight inside with terrible force. My gunner, who was looking through the scope at that moment, was seriously wounded in the head.

Our tank could no longer fight. I decided to get out of the hut and, having crossed the bridge over the anti-tank ditch, go to the rear. There I could try to collect those company tanks that managed to escape from this chaos.

We moved to the rear. I took the tank behind a small rise, where we were able to pull out the gunner and bandage his wounds.

At that moment, a sergeant-major, a technician from my company, appeared with a refurbished T-4. Our crew only needed to climb into it and return to battle with a full firing pin.

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The crew of this tank (except for the gunner we needed) had to get out of the vehicle and hand it over to

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his crew. However, as a company commander, I needed an experienced crew, given how many things I have to do at the same time. The company commander had to maintain radio contact with the battalion, lead his company and control the tank. In addition, it was necessary to indicate the goals to the gunner.

In the new tank, we moved across the bridge. By this time, the onslaught of the Russian offensive had weakened. Burning T-34s were scattered all over the field. From one of the operational officers of the battalion, who approached the tank, I learned that the battalion commander was going to launch a counterattack to recapture the high ground.

We quickly moved up the slope, from which we had recently moved out surrounded by Russians. Shortly before noon the height was again in our hands.

The losses of my company were surprisingly low. Only two vehicles were completely lost, the death of which I saw at the very beginning of the battle. There were no completely lost vehicles in the other two companies.

The artillery battalion and Peiper's battalion also managed to get by with minimal losses.

Interrogations of the prisoners showed that the enemy had a third wave of tanks ready, but it was never thrown into battle. In our defense zone there were more than a hundred destroyed Russian tanks (of which 14 were destroyed by the crew of von Ribbentrop. - B.S.).

In the afternoon, Commander General Hausser arrived on the battlefield to see for himself that the reports of this stunning success were correct. Later it was said that he marked the wrecked tanks with chalk and counted them with his own hand.

We contributed to this successful defensive battle because we were not taken by surprise by the sudden attack of a mass of Russian tanks. We were able to engage the enemy from the top of the hill and immediately knock out several T-34s, causing confusion in the ranks of the enemy.

Moreover, the noise of battle and the flames of burning enemy (and, unfortunately, two of our) tanks served as a timely warning to Peiper's battalion and artillery division.

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The brave infantrymen, having managed to keep their composure at the sight of the mass of enemy tanks, stopped and destroyed the advancing enemy infantry.

The Russians were attacking very massively and incredibly stubbornly.

Obviously, the Russian command was going to eliminate the threat posed by our troops, solely through brute force. With better leadership and use of the element of surprise, the enemy, far outnumbered by us, would inevitably be able to push back Peiper's battle group and, possibly, completely DESTROY it.

The Russian command should have understood that the anti-tank ditch they dug themselves would hinder the offensive."

On July 20, 1943, Rudolf von Ribbentrop was awarded the Knight's Cross. At the same time, he noted: "Each member of my crew deserved this award. I wear it on behalf of the entire crew." Eight days later, Obergruppenführer Hausser became the 261st German soldier to receive the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross. On August 1, 1943, Rudolf von Ribbentrop was transferred to participate in the formation of the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth".

The testimonies of Hausser and Ribbentrop prove that the attack of Rotmistrov's army as a whole turned out to be unexpected, although the infantry at the last moment noticed the advance of the tanks. If Hausser was expecting a counterattack, then it was against the Reich division, on Yakovlevo, which would have brought the Soviet tanks to the rear of the SS corps. The attack of the Leibstandarte on Prokhorovka was by no means delayed because it was on that day that Hausser expected a Soviet counterattack. He simply feared for the flanks of the Leibstandarte, which had advanced far towards Prokhorovka. Therefore, the offensive of this division and the Reich was postponed until the Totenkopf offensive in the bridgehead beyond Pselom had affected the stability of the Soviet defense and the threat to the Leibstandarte from the left flank had been eliminated. If Hausser feared a Soviet counterattack, then, I repeat, only on the Reich front. May be,

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therefore, the offensive of this division on July 12 began rather late. So, if the counterattack of the 5th Guards Tank Army had taken place according to Vatutin's original plan with the introduction of the main forces on Yakovlevo, it would have ended just as disastrously. The Germans expected this blow, and it was more difficult for the localities for the actions of tanks. The Leibstandarte command nevertheless decided to launch a local attack with the forces of Ribbentrop's company and Peiper's battalion to capture the Soviet advanced anti-tank positions. Probably, Rotmistrov's tankers did not even suspect the presence of such positions and did not try to establish interaction with the infantrymen and artillerymen who occupied them. Most likely, this German attack began around 0900 Moscow time or even a little earlier, since Ribbentrop heard heavy artillery fire before the attack. This was an artillery preparation before the offensive of Rotmistrov's army, which was so weak in its intensity and results that the Germans mistook it for an ordinary harassing artillery attack. Then, when Ribbentrop's company was already advancing to the line of attack, they tried to bring it back, behind the railway embankment. Apparently, at this moment, the commander of the Leibstandarte Brigadeführer Theodor Wisch, who a year later in Normandy was destined to lose both legs and acquire the Knight's Cross with oak leaves and swords, received reports that the infantry heard the noise of Soviet tanks, and decided take Ribbentrop's tank company back behind the embankment so that it can meet the enemy from covered positions. But, since at that moment Peiper's battalion, most likely, had already begun the offensive and it was too late to return it, Ribbentrop independently decided to support him with fire, contrary to the order. The rest of the tank companies did not advance that morning. Perhaps they were going to be thrown into battle later to develop success. If two advancing Soviet tank corps were to face an advancing tank regiment or even one Leibstandarte tank battalion in the open and in close combat, the results could be much more favorable for the Soviet side. The Germans were generally lucky that on July 12 the label

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Shtandart and "Reich" were going to start the offensive much later than the day before. Early in the morning, only the Totenkopf began to advance, but Rotmistrov's army did not act against this division at all that day. Note that the time of the start of the offensive in the SS corps varied significantly from the days of the Citadel. As testified by the former member of the Military Council of the 1-th tank army N.K. Popel, the Germans "On July 9, attacked at noon, and on the 10th at four in the morning (July 8, as Popel reports elsewhere in his memoirs, the Germans also attacked early in the morning, although not at four in the morning, and managed to preempt the counterattack of the brigades of Katukov's army - R.S.). Their staff was quirky and flexible. Parts, not afraid of losses, sought to carry out orders. Here and there they broke into our lines, crowded our battle formations. But they were not able to achieve tangible successes: our defense for them was as insurmountable as on July 5. And although they got closer to Obayan, the capture of this small town remained an impossible dream for them. At the same time, Nikolai Kirillovich admits that "it was [July 0, on the penultimate day of the offensive in the Obayan direction that the Germans inflicted the greatest damage on our two tank brigades." By the way, on that day it was the SS II Panzer Corps that fought against the 1st Panzer Army.

It can be assumed that the attack of Ribbentrop's company and Peiper's battalion ended at about 1100, when the tanks of the Soviet 18th and 29th tank corps approached the German positions. As a result, at the moment when the Soviet tanks were at the very Soviet positions and the infantrymen sent alarm signals, Ribbentrop's company found itself between the embankment and the Soviet attacking corps. Its commander decided not to return behind the embankment, but to take up a position on the crest of a nearby hill, and there almost point-blank collided with Soviet tanks, forcing them to prematurely accept the battle and warning Peiper's battalion of the danger. Actually, this collision of one German tank platoon of three tanks with a mass of Soviet armored vehicles became the only example of an oncoming tank battle in Prokhorovsky

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battle. But Rotmistrov, and after him many Soviet historians wrote repeatedly that the 5th Guards Tank Army and the SS Intank Corps were just fighting each other

counter battle. Romistrov left a colorful description of the Prokhorov battle in his memoirs: "I look through the binoculars and see how our glorious "thirty-fours" are rushing forward from the right and left, picking up speed. And then I find a lot of enemy tanks. It turned out that the Germans and we went on the offensive at the same time. I was surprised how close our and enemy tanks accumulated from each other. Two huge tank avalanches were moving towards them. The sun rising in the east dazzled the eyes of the German tankers and brightly illuminated the contours of the fascist tanks for ours.

A few minutes later, the tanks of the first echelon of our 29th and 18th corps, firing on the move, crashed into the battle formations of the Nazi troops with a frontal attack, literally piercing the enemy's battle formation with a swift through attack. The Nazis obviously did not expect to meet such a large mass of our fighting vehicles and their decisive attack. Management in the advanced units and subunits of the enemy was clearly broken. His "tigers" and "panthers", deprived of their fire advantage in close combat, which they used at the beginning of the offensive in a collision with our other tank formations, were now successfully hit by Soviet tanks T-34 and even T-70 from short distances. . The battlefield swirled with smoke and dust, the earth trembled from powerful explosions. Tanks jumped on each other and, having grappled, could no longer disperse, fought to the death until one of them burst into flames or stopped with broken tracks. But the wrecked tanks, if their weapons did not fail, continued to fire.

It was the first major oncoming tank battle during the war: tanks fought tanks. Due to the fact that the battle formations were mixed up, the artillery of both sides ceased fire. For the same reason, neither our nor enemy aircraft bombed the battlefield, although

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furious skirmishes and the howl of downed planes engulfed in flames mingled with the roar of a tank battle on the ground. Separate shots were not heard: everything merged into a single menacing rumble.

The tension of the battle grew with tremendous fury and force. Because of the fire, smoke and dust, it became more and more difficult to make out where they were and where they were strangers. However, having even a limited opportunity to observe the battlefield and knowing the decisions of the corps commanders, receiving their reports by radio, I imagined how the army troops were operating. What was happening there could also be determined by the orders of the commanders of our and German units and subunits, which were picked up by my radio station, given in clear text: "Forward!", "Orlov, come in from the flank", "Schneller, " Gkachenko, break through the rear!", "Forverts!", "Act like me", "Shneller!", "Forward!" , "Forverts!". There were also angry, vigorous expressions that are not published in either Russian or German dictionaries.

The tanks circled as if caught up in a gigantic whirlpool. "Thirty-four", maneuvering, dodging, shot "tigers" and "panthers", but they themselves, falling under direct fire from heavy enemy tanks and self-propelled guns, froze, burned, died. Hitting the armor, shells ricocheted, caterpillars were torn to pieces, rollers flew out, explosions of ammunition inside the vehicles ripped off and threw tank turrets aside.

The most difficult, extremely fierce battle was fought by the 29th tank corps of General I.F. Kirichenko, advancing along the railway and highways. The enemy threw against him the main forces of the SS Panzer divisions "Adolf Hitler" and "Dead Head", stubbornly making one after another persistent attempts to break through to Prokhorovka. However, the troops of the corps fought with exceptional stubbornness and did not yield to the achieved milestones....

The night came, uneasy and stuffy. The fighting ceased on all fronts. I left the dugout to stretch, to shake off my fatigue. There was a smell of burning and powder smoke. In the boundless cosmic ocean, distant

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stars. The moon cast a cold, dim light over the battle-ravaged land. In the west and southwest, the glow of fires fluttered. Uncut fields, forests, villages were burning.

The enemy was behaving strangely. Explosions were heard in his location. Then it turned out that the Germans blew up their wrecked tanks, which could not be evacuated."

It seems that the only case of mixing the battle formations of Soviet and German tanks, which Rotmistrov writes about as a mass phenomenon, in fact, was only the story of Ribbentrop, who, with his tank, was forced to join the wave of advancing Soviet tanks and quite successfully took advantage of an unexpected opportunity, destroying 14 Soviet tanks. His tank was damaged by a native German shell. The Soviet tankers did not find the enemy in their ranks. The offensive, I repeat, turned out to be sudden for the Germans, but they managed to quickly reorganize, and the remnants of Ribbentrop's company and other units met the advancing Soviet tanks from a distance and from behind shelters. The Germans blew up, of course, not their own damaged vehicles, as the dearest Pavel Alekseevich tried to assure the ingenuous readers, they safely evacuated their own tanks. They blew up damaged Soviet tanks left on the battlefield. After all, according to the combat regulations of the Wehrmacht, the senior commander was obliged at night after the battle to organize the destruction of the damaged equipment left by the enemy and the evacuation of his own equipment. That is why, when on the morning of July 13, the Soviet side began to count the losses, it turned out that all the damaged Soviet tanks on the Prokhorovka field had been blown up by the Germans, and

there are no German tanks on it at all.

For two days of fighting, on July 12 and 13, the number of combat-ready "tigers" in the Leibstandarte decreased by one unit. On the evening of July 13, the division had 16 less T-4s in service than on the evening of July 11. On the other hand, the number of combat-ready assault guns increased by 10 due to the fact that the vehicles knocked out in the previous days of fighting were repaired. Not excluded

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but that on July 13 the bulk of the lost T-4s failed for technical reasons, or on July 13 part of the losses suffered in the battle of Prokhorovka the day before was recorded, since on July 13 the Leibstandarte did not have major battles. On 12 July the division lost 39 killed, 5 missing and 235 wounded.

According to documentary Soviet data published by V.N. Zamulin and L.N. Lopukhovsky, [8th and 29th tank corps lost 256 tank self-propelled guns on July 12, 1943, or 72% of those that were available at the beginning battles. Of this number, 152 vehicles were lost forever. The casualties of the two corps amounted to at least 1,304 killed and missing and about 1,100 wounded, i.e., exceeded the total losses of the Leibstandarte by 8.6 times, and irretrievable losses by 29.6 times. Taking into account the losses of the 9th Guards Airborne Division, the real ratio of both total and irretrievable losses will be even more in favor of

Germans.

At the same time, the Reich division, which had 61 combat-ready tanks (1 Tiger, 8 T-34, 18 T-4, 34 T-3), 27 Shtug assault guns and 12 Marder anti-tank self-propelled guns, fought south of Prokhorovka against two Soviet tank corps - the 2nd Tank Corps and the 2nd Guards Tank Corps. The 2nd Panzer Corps had been in combat since 5 July. By July 12, 35 T-34s, 4 Churchills and 46 T-70s remained in service. Somewhat better was the condition of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, which by July 2 had 84 T-34s, 3 Churchills, and 52 T-70s combat-ready. However, one tank brigade of this corps with 44 tanks (26 T-34s, 18 T-70s) operated in the zone of the 69th Army. In addition, the Reich was opposed by the 183rd Infantry Division of the 69th Army. In total, the SS Panzer Division was opposed by [80 tanks, including 93 T-34s. On an equal footing with them, the Germans could only fight 27 vehicles.

The 2nd Guards Tank Corps had the task, together with the 183rd Rifle Division of the 69th Army, to cut off the retreat of the SS Panzer Corps, which, according to Rotmistrov's plan, were to be driven out of their positions by the 29th and 18th Panzer corps. He acted to the left of the advancing 29th Panzer Corps and remained in its positions

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greatly weakened in previous battles of the 2nd tank corps. At 1000 hours, the 25th and 4th Guards Tank Brigades of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps attacked in the first echelon, and the 4th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade in the second on a 3.5 km front. Rifle units and tankers almost did not interact with each other. By noon, the offensive was halted by German rocket-propelled six-barreled mortars and dive bombers. By 14.00 the 25th Guards Tank Brigade managed to pass 3.5 km from its starting positions and occupy a forest area north of the Ozerovsky farm. The advanced tanks of the 4th Guards Tank Brigade by 15.00 advanced 2 km to the southeastern outskirts of the Kalinin farm, where they were destroyed. The remaining tanks of the brigade stopped 1.5 km from their starting positions. In turn, the Reich division, with its left flank, began to advance towards the Storozhevoye farm in the gap between the 29th Tank Corps and the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, pushing the 169th Tank Brigade of the 2nd Tank Corps to the east. The 25th tank brigade of the 29th tank corps came to the aid of the 169th tank brigade, from which only one tank battalion remained, but its counterattack was repulsed. At 16.00 "Reich" captured the Storozhevoye farm and, advancing 2 km, approached the Vinogradovka farm. At 17:00, the 25th Guards Tank Brigade began to retreat to this farm. At 18:00 the 4th Guards Tank Brigade and at 20:00 the 4th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade withdrew to their original positions. At 18:00 Rotmistrov ordered the 2nd Tank Corps at 20:00 to strike with the main forces from the Ivanovka farm in the direction of the Teterovino farm. The corps launched an attack at 19.20, but two hours later it was stopped and retreated to its original positions. The 99th Tank Brigade managed to advance the farthest, losing 8 tanks out of its 19.

In these battles, the Reich division suffered insignificant losses. On the evening of July 12, 8 T-3s and 1 "tiger", and the number of T-4, T-34 and assault guns has not changed. The casualties of the "Reich" turned out to be almost the same as those of the Leibstandarte - 41 killed, 12 missing, 190 wounded. In the evening [July 3 at

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this division already had 75 tanks, including 11 T-34s. The number of the latter has increased by three units of roofing felts due to repaired machines, or due to new trophies. The Reich tanks had no irretrievable losses. It also seems that he did not have tanks that were permanently out of action and required long-term repairs.

And what about the losses on the Soviet side? On July 12, the 2nd Tank and 2nd Guards Tank Corps (without one tank brigade) lost 85 tanks, or 47% of those in service on the morning [July 2. Of these, 44 tanks were irretrievably lost. In the 2nd Guards Tank Corps alone, there were 154 killed and missing and 510 wounded, which already exceeded the total losses of the "Reich" by 2.7 times, and irretrievable losses by 2.9 times. Taking into account the human losses of the 2nd Tank Corps and the 183rd Rifle Division, the total losses of the Soviet formations opposing the "Reich" should have been at least 2-3 times higher than the losses of one 2nd Guards tank corps, and, obviously, exceeded the human losses of the German division by 6-9 times.

By the evening of July 11, the Totenkopf division had 94 tanks in service (10 Tigers, 30 T-4s, 54 T-3s), 20 assault guns and 1] Marder anti-tank self-propelled guns. She was to fight on the bridgehead behind Pysol against the 97th, 95th, 52nd and 42nd Guards Rifle Divisions of the 5th Guards Army. Behind the battle formations of these divisions was the 31st Tank Corps of the 1st Tank Army. It had been significantly weakened in previous battles and by 12 July had only 64 tanks combat-ready. On this day, the 3rd | 1st Tank Corps did not take part in the hostilities.

The Totenkopf division, the first of the divisions of the SS Panzer Corps, began to advance at 5.25 in the morning, having crossed the Psyol. The capture of the bridgehead by it was supposed to facilitate the subsequent attacks of the Reich and the Leibstandarte, who did not expect an attack by the 5th Guards Tank Army that day.

Rotmistrov subsequently claimed that on the evening of July 12 he had thrown the 24th Guards Tank and 10th Guards against the strongly advanced units of the Totenkopf division.

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mechanized brigade from the 5th guards mechanized corps, numbering 105 combat-ready tanks. However, Soviet combat documents testify that the 10th Guards Mechanized Brigade did not participate in the battles on July 12. Also, according to the report of "Totenkopf" dated 20.00 (22.00 Moscow time) on July 12, the division did not encounter Soviet tanks that day. However, according to the report of the headquarters of the II SS Panzer Corps dated 21.50 on July 12, at that time the tank regiment of the Totenkopf division continued to fight with Soviet tanks northwest of Polezhaev. It was probably the 24th Guards Tank Brigade, numbering 61] tanks, of which, according to Soviet documents, at least 13 vehicles were lost. So Rotmistrov did not lie. By the end of the day on July 12, the Totenkopf had advanced 5 km to the northeast. This was the largest advance among the II divisions of the SS Panzer Corps.

By the evening (at 20.35) on July 12, the number of tanks in the Totenkopf had decreased by | T-3 compared to the evening of 11] July. The number of other tanks, as well as assault guns and self-propelled guns, has not changed. The division's casualties were 69 killed, 16 missing and 231 wounded. But by the evening of July 13, at 21.35, the number of T-3s decreased by 21, T-4s by 13, and Tigers by 10. It is possible that some of these losses occurred in the late evening of July 12, when "Dead Head" fought with the 24th Guards Tank Brigade. It can also be assumed that the vast majority of "tigers" failed for technical reasons. As a rule, T-6 tanks, after several days of fighting or marches, required repairs. It is likely that the Totenkopf Division lost only one T-3 tank on July 12, but it may have been irretrievably lost.

The Soviet formations opposing the Totenkopf on July 2 suffered much greater losses. On this day, the 95th Guards Rifle Division alone lost 948 killed, 729 missing and 1,649 wounded. These losses alone already exceed the total human losses of the Totenkopf on July 12 by 10.5 times, and the irretrievable losses by 19.7 times. If we take into account the losses of three more Soviet rifle

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divisions and a tank brigade fighting against the "Totenkopf", then, quite possibly, the total Soviet losses could be three times higher than the losses of the 95th Guards Rifle Division alone. In this case, the total Soviet losses in people can exceed the losses of the German division by 30 times, and irretrievable - by 60 times.

Thus, no more than 211 German tanks and 100 assault guns and self-propelled guns were fighting directly near Prokhorovka on July 12 against 577 Soviet tanks and 20 self-propelled guns that were directly involved in the battle. Another 108 Soviet tanks were close to the battlefield, but did not participate in the battle that day. Perhaps it is more correct to compare the total number of armored vehicles of the parties, since we do not have information whether all the tank units of the SS divisions participated in the battle on that day. Moreover, the refusal of the Soviet command to commit the 31st Tank Corps and the 10th Guards Mechanized Brigade into battle against the Totenkopf division led to the fact that the Soviet rifle divisions opposing the Dead Head suffered very heavy losses in people, especially irretrievable. The ratio of the total number of combat-ready armored vehicles is 2.3:1. The results of the battle for the Soviet side, despite its significant quantitative superiority in tanks, turned out to be disastrous.

In the central sector, the offensive of the 18th and 29th Tank Corps and the 9th Guards Airborne Division was stopped by the Leibstandarte. In the farm area

The "October" SS men remained in their previous positions. The 18th Panzer Corps managed to wedge into the enemy. defense only in a narrow section of 2 km along the front to a depth of 5 km butt-to-butt between the Totenkopf and Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler divisions, and the 29th Panzer occupied a neutral zone in front of the Oktyabrsky. These more than modest successes in no way justified the huge losses in men and armored vehicles, despite the fact that the Leibstandarte suffered only very small losses.

On the northern flank of the SS corps 97th, 95th, 52nd and 42nd guards rifle divisions and the 24th guards tank brig

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Yes, they could not hold back the onslaught of the Totenkopf division, which advanced 5 km in depth on a front of 6 km.

Finally, on the southern flank of the Hausser corps, the 2nd Guards and 2nd Tank Corps, together with the 183rd Rifle Division, were also unable to hold back the offensive of the Reich division, which advanced 2 km in depth on the 8 km front. .

The battle of Prokhorov is perhaps the most mythologized episode of the Battle of Kursk in Soviet historiography. It was alleged that during this battle, Soviet troops stopped the German offensive on the southern face of the Kursk Bulge, which was decisive for the outcome of the battle. At the same time, the forces of the parties were allegedly approximately equal, or even the Germans had some quantitative superiority. The losses in tanks were also approximately equal, but due to the fact that the battlefield was left behind by our tankers, the irretrievable losses of German tanks turned out to be greater than those of Soviet ones.

Research conducted over the past 15 years and based on archival documents has irrefutably proved that all these statements have nothing to do with reality, although the battle of Prokhorovka was indeed one of the largest tank battles of the Second World War.

The number of tanks of the 2nd SS Panzer Corps ready for battle, according to German data, by the evening of July 11 was 236 tanks (including 7 captured T-34s and [5 "Tigers"), assault guns - 57. By the evening 13 July, when Rotmistrov's army stopped attacking, 187 tanks remained in service, including [2 T-34s (perhaps 5 vehicles were taken as trophies of Rotmistrov's army) and only 4 "tigers". On the other hand, the number of assault guns increased to 64. Taking into account the fact that 12 assault guns were out of action on July 12 and 13 for a long time, it remains to be assumed that the repairmen returned to service during this time [9 previously damaged assault guns. The number of combat-ready German tanks decreased by 54 tanks in two days. This suggests that at least 8 more tanks required mid-term repairs.

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they were not included in the number of 43 tanks named by Frizer, which required a longer repair. In fact, there were probably more damaged tanks that required medium-term repair, since the repairmen managed to return to service some vehicles damaged before July 12. Some of the German "thirty-fours" that participated in the battle could also be damaged if more than 5 serviceable trophies were taken from Rotmistrov. However, the total number of damaged German tanks cannot be established, but it is clear that there were at least 51 of them, and losses amounted to at least 54 tanks and 12 assault guns. In addition, there were about 43 lightly armored self-propelled guns "Marder" in the corps [1 July], for which there are no data on losses. According to their tactical and technical data, they were similar to the Soviet SU-76.

Now let's turn to Rotmistrov's army. According to combat reports, by the morning of July 12, it had 755 tanks and self-propelled guns, i.e., 2.3 times more than the Hausser corps. In reality, the ratio was even more favorable for the Soviet side, since the division "Dead Head" against the army of Rotmistrov acted only part of the forces. According to Rotmistrov, in total

he had 850 tanks and self-propelled guns, from which we can conclude that 95 vehicles were out of order after the forced march of the front line. The irretrievable losses of Rotmistrov's army for July 12 amounted, according to the report of the army headquarters, to 192 tanks and self-propelled guns. This is without taking into account the losses of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps, against the SS N-Tank Corps, which did not act. In addition, [50 vehicles were damaged. Losses of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps amounted to 20 tanks, irretrievably lost, and 8 damaged. At the same time, there was no data on the losses of the 1447th self-propelled artillery regiment, which may have lost up to 11 self-propelled guns knocked out and burned. In terms of irretrievable losses, the ratio is 48:1 (assuming that 1 Marder was destroyed near Prokhorovka), and in terms of total losses, about 10.7:1. The numbers are killer. This was due to the fact that the battlefield was left to the Germans, which was actually admitted by a member of the Voro Military Council

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Nega Front Nikita Khrushchev. In a report to Stalin about the Battle of Prokhorovka, he pointed out that "when retreating by specially created teams, the enemy evacuates his wrecked tanks and other materiel, and everything that cannot be taken out, including our tanks and our materiel, burns and undermines. As a result of this, the damaged materiel part captured by us in most cases cannot be repaired, but can be used as scrap metal, which we will try to evacuate from the battlefield in the near future."

The main battle took place between the SS division "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" and the 18th and 29th tank corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army on a 5 km front between the Psol River and the railway. On the evening of July 11, the Leibstandarte had 77 tanks and assault guns, including 4 Tigers, and about 20 Marder light self-propelled guns. On July 12-13, irretrievable losses amounted to 2 T-4 tanks. Another 15 T-4 and 1 T-3s were sent for medium-term repairs, and 2 T-4s and 2 T-3s for long-term repairs. Probably the third irretrievably lost German tank on July 12 was 1 T-4 from the Totenkopf division. It is possible that during the Prokhorov battle, 1 self-propelled gun "Marder" from the Leibstandarte was also irretrievably lost. Two Soviet corps numbered 398 combat-ready tanks and self-propelled guns, of which [July 2, 348 vehicles took part in the battle. On July 12 alone, their irretrievable losses amounted to 138 vehicles and another 99 vehicles were damaged. The ratio in terms of the number of tanks and self-propelled guns is 1:3.6, in terms of irretrievable losses 34.5:1, and in terms of total losses 11.3:1. Let us recall how the Soviet tank crews did not recognize the Ribbentrop tank that wedged into their formation, and the German tank survived, destroying 14 Soviet tanks. Ribbentrop is sure that they were not found "because the Russians did not have a separate tank commander - the tanks were commanded by gunners who could only look in the direction in which their guns were deployed." With the Germans, the commander was looking for targets, and the gunner was shooting. In addition, due to an acute shortage of communications, radio stations were not installed on all

Soviet tanks, but only on tanks

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divisional commanders. The rest of the tanks had only radios. This also prevented the destruction of Ribbentrop's tank. After all, a tank commander who suspected something was wrong could not quickly convey information to his comrades. The Germans knew that only the tanks of commanders of units and subdivisions had full-fledged radio stations, they identified the commander's tanks by the antenna and tried to put them out of action in the first place. After that, Soviet tanks lost control from the commander and became easy prey, since none of the crew commanders could take control of the unit anymore. By the way, it is possible that all the tanks were not equipped with radios also because they were afraid of an unauthorized initiative of their subordinates, in particular, that they would fill the air with extraneous conversations. All German tanks had radio stations. Soviet driver mechanics were several times inferior to the German driving experience. I note that already during the Great Patriotic War, on September 19, 1942, Stalin issued a special order instructing tanks to conduct artillery fire mainly on the move and without fail to install additional fuel tanks on the armor to increase the cruising range. Since the stabilizers that allow you to drive

aimed shooting from a tank on the move appeared only in the 1950s, Stalin's order doomed tank crews to useless waste of shells. Additional fuel tanks turned the tank into a fire when hit by a bullet or shrapnel. It is not surprising that, despite the qualitative superiority of the T-34 and KV over German vehicles and a noticeable quantitative superiority that persisted until the middle of 1943, our tankers lost battles to the enemy, including, in tactical terms, and the battle under Kursk.

Unlike the 5th Guards Tank Army, the 2nd SS Panzer Corps after the Battle of Prokhorov by no means lost its combat capability. On July 14-16, he successfully operated against the encircled divisions of the 69th Army in the Shakhovo region, and on July 30, without a Leibstandarte sent to Italy, he launched a successful counterattack on the Soviet bridgehead on the Mius River

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and liquidated it by 2 August. The army of Rotmistrov, already on July 14, stopped all attacks. It went on the offensive only on August 3, as part of the general offensive of the Voronezh Front. The attacks on Prokhorovka and the offensive on Kursk were stopped only because after the beginning of the Soviet offensive on the northern face of the Kursk Bulge on July 12, Hitler stopped Operation Citadel. The entire significance of the Prokhorovka battle was reduced to the fact that the 5th Guards Tank Army suffered heavy losses and could not actively participate in the pursuit of the Germans when, after July 16, they began to retreat to their original positions.

On August 20, 1943, Rotmistrov wrote to Zhukov: "... Our tanks today have lost their superiority over enemy tanks in terms of armor and weapons.

The armament, armor and aiming of the fire of the German tanks became much higher, and only the exceptional courage of our tankers, the greater saturation of the tank units with artillery did not give the enemy the opportunity to use the advantages of their tanks to the end. The presence of powerful weapons, strong armor and good aiming devices in German tanks puts our tanks in a clearly disadvantageous position. The effectiveness of the use of our tanks is greatly reduced and their failure is increasing. Indeed, the optics of the German tank guns were better, and they fired more accurately. And the gunners in the SS Panzer Corps were more experienced than the Soviet ones. As Lopukhovsky notes, "our T-34 tank could not win a duel in the open area with the German medium tank T-[U] with this new long-barreled gun (48 calibers, muzzle velocity 1.5 times higher than our 76-mm gun F-34)". No T-34 had certain advantages even over the upgraded T-! U in terms of maneuverability, maneuverability, and engine power. All this could be used to achieve success, especially since the Germans had few "tigers". But here's the problem: the Soviet tank commanders were utterly inferior to the German ones. As Ribbentrop Jr. noted: "We never understood why the Russians directed their attack through the area covered by the anti-tank ditch, oh creatures

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which they certainly knew." That's the unfortunate thing that is unknown. Rotmistrov led the army into battle without reconnaissance, without studying the terrain. And we got a natural result. Soviet tanks huddled in front of the only crossing over the ditch and were perfect targets for the enemy.

Taking into account everything we know about the course of the Battle of Kursk and other tank battles in which the Red Army massively used tanks, you will inevitably come to the conclusion that the best way to use them by Soviet commanders, taking into account both their personal qualities, and the human material that was at their disposal (both soldiers and generals were brought up and trained in military affairs under a rigid totalitarian system), the optimal tactic would be to use tanks only in small groups and mainly for direct support infantry. To fight with machine tools, it would be more expedient to use artillery. As we will see in one of the following chapters, during the two battles at Lake Balaton in Hungary in January - March 1945, she most effectively fought the German

tanks, Soviet anti-tank and field artillery, as well as minefield sappers. The contribution of aviation was negligible, and when a significant number of tanks collided with each other, the Germans invariably prevailed even then, and just as confidently as in the battle of Prokhorovka. In the Red Army, the relatively simpler type of troops, like artillery, was strong compared to the more complex tank troops and aviation. Characteristically, in the course of Operation Citadel, the 19th Panzer Division, which had to act mainly against Soviet infantry and artillery on the ground, dotted with minefields and heavily covered anti-tank obstacles. She irretrievably lost 23 tanks and 3 assault guns during the period from 5 to 16 July. Also, the 503rd battalion of "tigers" attached to it lost at least one vehicle in the sector of this division. Only the Panther brigade, attached to

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XE\USH tank corps. She irrevocably lost 42 out of 204 vehicles between July 5 and 16. This was due to the fact that the Panthers had not yet been technically brought to condition in the field, since they were first used in combat only during Operation Citadel and very often during the battle or on the march failed for operational reasons. It was rather DIFFICULT to evacuate them because of the large weight.

Note that during the German retreat, the irretrievable losses of the Panthers increased even more due to the inability to evacuate the vehicles being repaired and out of order for technical reasons. After all, the Panthers could be towed either by the Panthers and Tigers themselves, or by powerful tractors and evacuation tanks, of which there were a limited number. As a result, by the end of July 20, only 41 | panther tank. 58 tanks were irretrievably lost, and another 10] tank required repair, including 16 at factories in Germany. Since in the document dated July 16 the tanks sent to Germany were counted as irretrievable losses, it turns out that during the 4 days of the retreat, the irretrievable losses of the T-5 increased by 32 vehicles, of which 7 fell into the hands of the Russians.

In general, the bet on "tigers" and "panthers" during the Battle of Kursk was not fully justified. Hitler was in vain postponing the start of the Citadel, waiting for the massive arrival of tanks of new designs. Another thing, he had other reasons to delay with the Citadel. After all, by postponing the attack on Kursk, having convinced himself of the intention of the Soviet command to adhere to a defensive course of action for the time being, he thereby postponed the time of the inevitable sooner or later Soviet offensive. -

As for the "tigers" and "panthers", in July 1943 they were to some extent "excessive luxury." Modernized T-4s with a long-barreled 75-mm cannon, which cost an order of magnitude less than T-5s and T-6s, relatively easily dealt with T-34s. Tanks, the armor and weapons of which required only

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"tigers" and "panthers" (and this, in fact, is only KVi SU-152), in the Red Army at that moment it was very little.

But Rotmistrov was considered one of the best tank commanders in the Red Army. Not without reason, even before the Battle of Kursk, Krasnaya Zvezda published an article about him with the eloquent title "Master of Tank Troops Driving". Who then were Hausser, Goth or Manstein? Probably supermasters. In any case, near Prokhorovka, Hausser butchered the "masters" to a walnut.

On July 12, the 5th Guards Tank Army, according to Soviet data, lost 343 tanks and self-propelled guns, not counting the losses of units of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps and the brigade of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps in the Shakhovo area. This is 57% of the total number of Soviet armored vehicles that participated in the Battle of Prokhorovka.

July 12 and 13 And the SS Panzer Corps irretrievably lost 2 tanks, and another 43 tanks and 2 assault guns needed long-term repairs (over three weeks). This amounted to 21.6% of the number of combat-ready tanks and assault guns in the corps by the morning of July 12. If we take the size of the corps at the beginning of the "Citadel", when it had about 327 combat-ready tanks and about 105 assault guns, then the percentage of losses in the battle of Prokhorovka will be 13.4%. There is no data on the losses of German self-propelled guns, as well as command, evacuation and other auxiliary tanks. The number of tanks and assault guns that needed medium-term repair after the Battle of Prokhorov is also unknown.

On July 13, 1943, 251 tanks and assault guns were in service in the 2nd SS Panzer Corps (excluding the Marlers, Grilles, Vespes and Hummels), that is, only 22 units less than on the morning of 12 July. The Leibstandarte had 53 tanks, including 3 Tigers, and 20 assault guns; the Reich had 83 tanks, including 1 "Tiger", 11 T-34s and 24 assault guns. In "Totenkopf" remained in the ranks of 54 tanks and 16 assault guns.

Of course, part of the losses suffered on July 12 was compensated by the machines returning from repairs. In part-

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Unfortunately, 21 tanks and assault guns, which by the morning of July 12 were under short-term repairs, were probably back in service. At least another 15 cars were supposed to return from mid-term and long-term repairs by the morning of July 13. However, such a slight decrease in the number of combat-ready vehicles per day suggests that the number of tanks and assault guns put out of action on July 12 and in need of medium-term repair may have amounted to 10-15 vehicles. Then the total number of tanks and assault guns that returned on July 13 from medium- and long-term repairs can be estimated at 25-30 vehicles. Hummels and Vespes were almost never used in the fight against tanks. Most likely, on July 12, the SS Panzer Corps had no losses in this type of military equipment on July 12, or they were minimal (1-2 guns). It remains to estimate the losses in the Marders.

We have data on the irretrievable losses of military equipment by divisions of the SS Panzer Corps for the period from 5 to 18 July, i.e., for the entire time of the "Citadel" on the southern face of the Kursk salient.

The Leibstandarte lost irretrievably during this period 1 tank T-1, 1 T-3 tank, 7 T-4, 3 Shtug assault guns, 2 Marder self-propelled guns. In addition, 1 "Tiger", 2 T-4i | The Marders were shipped to Germany for a long-term factory overhaul.

"Reich" irretrievably lost 2 T-3, 6 T-4, 1 "Tiger" and 2 "Thing".

The irretrievable losses of the Totenkopf amounted to 5 T-3, 6 T-4, 1 Tiger, 1 Shtug and 2 Marder.

It is not entirely clear whether this includes data on irretrievable losses of auxiliary tanks. It can be assumed that they are, since the obsolete T-1 vleibstandarte could only play the role of an auxiliary tank (commander, evacuation, minesweeper tank, etc.).

Thus, it turns out that in total during the operation "Citadel" II, the SS Panzer Corps irrevocably lost 30 tanks, 6 (or possibly 5, as we will see below) assault guns and 4 anti-tank self-propelled guns. Another 3 tanks and 1 self-propelled guns were sent to Germany for repairs.

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There is also data on the irretrievable losses of armored vehicles of the divisions of the SS corps in the period from 5 to 16 July 1943. During this period, the Leibstandarte lost 1 T-3, 9 T-4, 1 Tiger and 1 "Stug". The irretrievable losses of "Reich" amounted to 1 T-3, 6 T-4, 1 "tiger" and 1 "Stug". Finally, "Gotenkopf" irretrievably lost 2 T-3, 8 T-4, 1 "Tiger" and 1 "Stug". This document does not take into account losses

auxiliary tanks and Marders. The difference between the data for July 5-16 and July 5-18, most likely, was formed mainly not due to the irretrievable losses suffered by the SS corps on July 17 and 18 (these days, in all likelihood, there are almost no irretrievable losses in armored vehicles had), but due to different categories of accounting. | the irretrievably lost tank of the Leibstandarte was obviously an auxiliary tank. The 2 T-4 tanks and 1 Tiger evacuated to Germany were undoubtedly classified as irretrievable losses in the document dated July 16, due to which the difference in numbers formed. It remains to explain the difference in losses in the Shtugs. Between 16 and 18 July their irretrievable losses in the Leibstandarte increased from 1 to 3. It remains to be assumed that two assault guns were irretrievably lost in the retreat on 17 and 18 July. In addition, according to the Leibstandarte, there are divisional data on losses in the period up to 18 July. They are somewhat at odds with the body. According to these data, in the period from July 1 to July 19, the Leibstandarte irretrievably lost 1 T-1 tank, | T-3 tank, 4 T-4 tanks, 2 Shtuga and 2 Marder. The most probable assumption seems to be that 1 Shtug, previously considered irretrievably lost, was evacuated and returned to service after July 10 and therefore was not reflected in the summary of the losses of Army Group South on July 16. If our assumption is correct, then it turns out that on July 7 and 18 the Leibstandarte irretrievably lost only 1 Shtug, and another Shtug was lost in the period up to July 10. In the Prokhorov battle, this division obviously did not have irretrievable losses in the Shtugs. In the period from 11 to 18 July, the irretrievable losses of the Leibstandarte amounted to 5 T-4 tanks, | "Stug" and | 1 "Marder". Another "tiger" during this period was evacuated to Germany. The irretrievable losses of the division in the Prokhorov battle most likely amounted to

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2 T-4, mentioned by R. Ribbentrop, and | "tiger". It is possible that one Marder could have been destroyed in this battle, but Ribbentrop does not mention it. He does not speak about the death of the "tiger", perhaps because it was not a pure irretrievable loss, but only an evacuation for repairs to his homeland.

Irretrievable losses of the division "Reich" in the period from | to July 10 amounted to | tank T-3, | tank T-4 and | 1 assault gun. Between July 11 and 18, this division irretrievably lost approximately 1 T-3, 5 T-4 and | "Stug". Division "Gotenkopf", in turn, in the period from 1 to 10 July irretrievably lost 2 T-3 tanks, 8 T-4 tanks, | "Tiger" and 1 assault gun, and in the period from 11 to 18 July - 4 T-Zi 2 "Mardera" tanks. It is unlikely that even one of these "Marders" died on July 12, since on this day the "Gotenkopf" almost did not deal with Soviet tanks. |

Thus, even taking into account the Marders, the irretrievable losses of the SS corps on July 12 could not be more than 4 armored vehicles. According to Colonel-General Gotthard Heinrici, who commanded the 4th Army in Army Group Center during the Battle of Kursk, the irretrievable losses of German armored vehicles during that period amounted to 15-20% of its total losses. If we apply even the lower limit (15%) of this proportion to the losses of the SS tank corps SP, it turns out that on July 12, in addition to 4 irretrievably lost tanks and self-propelled guns, it could lose no more than 24 tanks, self-propelled guns and assault guns as in need in long-term and medium-term repairs. In fact, the figures of its losses turn out to be twice as high, and at the expense of the machines sent for long-term repairs alone. This suggests that the number of vehicles sent for medium-term repairs; was negligible, and our estimate of 10-15 tanks and assault guns in need of medium-term repair after the battle on July 12 at 10-15 vehicles is close to reality.

In total, on the northern face of the Kursk Bulge, from July 5 to July 14, the German 9th Army irrevocably lost 88 tanks and assault guns (including 4 Tigers and 19 Ferdinand

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dov"), on the southern face of the arc in the period from 5 to 17 July, the troops of the Army Group "South" irretrievably lost 190 tanks and self-propelled guns (including 6 "tigers" and 44 "panthers"). By noon on July 10, the entire German 4th Panzer Army had irretrievably lost 64 tanks and assault guns, and 462 tanks and assault guns were under repair. Based on this proportion, the share of irretrievable

losses in the total losses of German armored vehicles on the southern face of the Kursk Bulge could be about 12.2%, which is close to the lower limit of Heinrici's estimate. If we apply this proportion to determine the losses of the SS corps at the entrance of the Prokhorov battle on July 12, based on data on its irretrievable losses, then the total losses of the SS divisions can be estimated in 33 tanks, assault guns and anti-tank self-propelled guns, of which 29 needed medium and long term repairs. Since we have already estimated the number of tanks and assault guns in need of long-term repair at 28 tanks and self-propelled guns, it seems completely unbelievable that only one German tank needed a medium-term repair after the Battle of Prokhorov. Moreover, this contradicts the data on the loss of combat-ready tanks and assault guns of the SS corps by the end [July 3.

It can be assumed that such a large number of armored vehicles - 43 tanks and 12 assault guns, which needed long-term repairs after the battles of July 12 and 13, is due to the fact that at some time Hausser's tanks were already continuously engaged in intense battles and carried out maneuvers for 8-9 days in a row, which could not but affect their technical life, especially considering that the situation did not always allow for the necessary maintenance work. Let us recall that on July 12-13 the number of combat-ready "tigers" in the "Totenkopf" division decreased by 10 at once. It is unlikely that most of them could be shot down in battle. Where the Totenkopf was advancing these days, there were very few Soviet tanks. There were no guns capable of penetrating the frontal armor of the Tiger. Rather, it can be assumed that most of the "tigers" failed for technical reasons. After all, this heavy tank could fail in 5-6 days

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intermittent combat use, if routine maintenance was not regularly carried out on it. If this assumption is correct, then the distribution of this category of losses between July 12 and 13 does not depend on the intensity of their combat use on these days and can be distributed approximately equally. Let me remind you that in "Gotenkopf" 10 "tigers" were listed as out of action on July 13, as well as 21 T-3Zi and 13 T-4. Most likely, in this division on July 13, losses for two days were taken into account. It turns out that one "Gotenkopf" should have lost at least 44 tanks, i.e. on | more than lost the entire corps of the SS as machines requiring long-term repairs. It remains to be assumed, taking into account the dynamics of changes in the number of combat-ready tanks in the corps between July 11 and 16, that most of the tanks of the Gotenkopf division, with the exception of the Tigers, that were out of action, needed only short-term repairs. In this case, by July 12, up to 22 tanks and up to 6 assault guns may fall out of action as in need of long-term repairs. And then the total losses of the SS Panzer Corps in the Battle of Prokhorovka can be estimated at 47 vehicles, of which up to 15 tanks, assault guns and self-propelled guns needed mid-term repairs. If we attribute this number to the number of armored vehicles of the corps by July 5 (480 units, without Hummels and Vespes, due to very weak armor (20-30 mm armor thickness in the frontal part) used only as field artillery guns, nose 24 "Grille", for which there is no data on losses), this will be about 9.8%.

The losses of personnel of the SS Panzer Corps on July 12 reached 149 killed, 33 missing and 660 wounded, in total 842 officers and men. On | July, the SS corps had 72,960 soldiers and officers, of which 4,164 were hi-wie (H1-\) ("volunteer assistants") from among former Soviet citizens. Thus, Hausser's corps lost less than 1.2% of its strength in the Battle of Prokhorov by the time the "Citadel" began.

It is indicative that the share of losses in armored vehicles turned out to be more than 8 times higher than the share of losses in the personnel of the corps. This difference was formed both due to the fact that

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Most of the personnel served in the rear units, which suffered almost no losses, and due to the fact that the more active use of armored vehicles reduced infantry losses, but led to an increase in tank losses.

The Germans, unlike the commanders of the Red Army, tried to avoid significant losses in manpower and equipment, economically approached the expenditure of human and material resources. In particular, the loss in one attack of more than 10% of the tanks and the infantry accompanying them from the initial, before the attack, number was considered unacceptable. During the Prokhorov battle, this rule was fulfilled with a large margin.

Soviet losses on July 12 near Prokhorovka exceeded 10,000 killed, missing, and wounded. The Panzer Corps on that day captured 968 prisoners and announced the destruction of 249 Soviet tanks and self-propelled guns. On | In July, the total strength of the armies of Zhadov and Rotmistrov was about 130,000 soldiers and officers. With this in mind, the loss of personnel amounted to about 8% of the original number. The 29th Tank Corps alone lost 12 July 1991 men, including 1,033 killed and missing, and the 95th Guards Rifle Division lost 3,326 men. It is not clear what was there to be proud of the army commander and commander of the Voronezh Front Vatutin and the commanders of the 5th Guards and 5th Guards Tank Armies?

In total, during the "Citadel" II, the SS Panzer Corps announced the destruction of 1149 Soviet tanks and self-propelled guns. This fits well with the data of the reports of the headquarters of the Voronezh Front about the irretrievable loss of 1800 tanks. After all, most of them were destroyed by the SS tank corps, which acted most effectively of all the corps of Army Group South. General Hermann Goth, commander of the 4th Panzer Army, introduced the corps commander to the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross, noting that, despite the fact that he was maimed by previous wounds, Hausser "tirelessly led the course of hostilities every day. His very presence, his courage and humor in the most difficult situations gave stability to his troops.

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zeal and enthusiasm, and at the same time he firmly held the command of his corps in his hands ... Hausser again distinguished himself as a highly qualified military leader. On July 28, 1943, Hausser was awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross for successful actions during the attack on Kursk.

On July 12, as well as on July 13, the German offensive on the southern face of the Kursk Bulge was by no means stopped, as Soviet memoirists and historians often wrote after Rotmistrov. |

German documents show that the decision to stop the attack on Kursk was made by the German command without regard to the Battle of Prokhorov. Thus, an entry in the diary of the Wehrmacht Supreme High Command dated July 11, 1943 says: "During Operation Citadel, the Russian shock wedge was narrowed and the Belgorod front was cleared. The 9th Army advanced only 2-3 km due to the stubborn resistance of the enemy. Since quick success has not been achieved, it is now a question of inflicting maximum damage to the enemy with minimal own losses. In the same diary, in an entry dated July 16, 1943, it is noted: "The strike force of Army Group South has captured new territory." Consequently, the decision to stop the offensive with the aim of capturing Kursk, the German command, in principle, took even before the battle of Prokhorov, [July 1 that reconnaissance in battle will be followed by a Soviet counteroffensive). And if Goth was still planning to continue the attack on Prokhorovka on the evening of July 12, then on the morning of July 13, when the commanders of the army groups that carried out the "Citadel" were called for a conference with Hitler, he was already careful not to attack, suspecting that in the light of events on the northern face of the Kursk Bulge and in Sicily, Operation Citadel may be terminated. Even if Hausser's corps had taken Prokhorovka on July 12, he would have had to leave it the next day due to a general change in the strategic situation. attack from

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with the aim of inflicting maximum losses on the enemy, the Germans continued on the southern face of the Kursk Bulge until July 16, within 4 days after the Battle of Prokhorov.

It is significant that at 10:00 am on July 16, Vatutin gave the order to conduct a defensive operation: "In order to finally exhaust the forces of the advancing enemy grouping, the armies of the Voronezh Front should switch to stubborn defense on the occupied lines with the task of preventing the enemy from breaking through our defenses. The readiness of the defense - by 5.00 17.7.1943. On this day, the 1st Panzer Army withdrew to the second echelon of the Voronezh Front. On the same morning, on the orders of Field Marshal Erichafon Manstein, commander of Army Group South, the rear units of the German troops began to withdraw to the positions they had occupied on July 5. The Germans stopped their attacks and began to withdraw their troops. The intelligence of the Soviet troops did not find this.

At 3:30 am on July 17, when the German troops were already withdrawing, Vatutin gave another order to the commanders of the 5th Guards Tank, 5th Guards and 69th Armies "to improve the defense." This order ordered "tank units and subunits occupying the defense in front of the rifle units, immediately replace with reinforced combat guards and withdraw behind the infantry." Now the 5th Guards Tank Army was assigned to the second echelon.

On the same day, at 3:00 Berlin time, the II SS Panzer Corps received an order to withdraw its divisions to assembly points in the Belgorod region for subsequent shipment to Italy. As a result, only the Leibstandarte went there, while the Reich and Gotenkopf, together with the corps headquarters, sent the Mius to the Mius front to liquidate the extremely dangerous Soviet bridgehead. The participation of the SS Panzer Corps in the "Citadel" on July 7 ended with the operation itself.

As early as July 14, 1943, Vasilevsky reported to Headquarters: "... tank attacks undertaken by the enemy during the day southwest of Prokhorovka on the Belenikhino front, Teterevino were repulsed, with the exception of Belenikhino, where the enemy broke into the western part. Now there's a fight

cleaning up

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opponent of Belenikhino. We began to withdraw Rotmistrov to the reserve in order to create a new powerful fist ... ". Practically from this report it can be understood that in two days of fighting the 5th Guards Tank Army has actually lost its combat capability and it has to be withdrawn to the reserve for replenishment with people and equipment. |

In the report created to investigate the heavy losses of armored vehicles in the 5th Guards Tank Army of the commission G.M.

' On the southern face of the Kursk Bulge, the Germans continued to advance after 12 July. However, this offensive by Manstein's troops no longer had a strategic goal - since the events on the northern face of the Kursk Bulge (the impossibility, as von Kluge reported to Hitler on July 13, of the further advance of the 9th Army and deep breakthroughs in three sectors of the front and the 2nd Panzer Army) put an end to the Citadel.

Therefore, after July 12, on the southern front, Manstein only tried to inflict as much damage as possible on the Soviet troops, trying to eliminate the "bag" in the Shakhovo region, so that he could then withdraw his forces without interference to positions advantageous for defense, freeing up part of the troops for other sectors. front. Manstein basically solved these problems. Therefore, on July 13, the SS corps stopped attacks on Prokhorovka. "Reich" began preparations for an attack on Shakhovo, "Toten Kampf" carried out local attacks, and the Leibstandarte was preparing to withdraw from the front.

As Russian historian Andrey Akhmedov ironically notes, "On July 13, 1943, the Soviet generals who took part in the July 12 massacre at Prokhorovka station faced a much more difficult task than meaningful military operations against the Germans. They needed to be saved

his skin from the wrath of the Supreme Commander. To avoid punishment, fraught with loss of life, a whole strategy was developed. First, it was necessary to create the illusion of an almost won victory. Secondly, it was necessary to stretch this illusion as long as possible in time to reduce

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niya sharpness of perception by the higher authorities. Work on solving these most important tasks began to boil at the headquarters of the Voronezh Front, at the headquarters of the armies and corps. Marshal of the Soviet Union A.M. Vasilevsky, who was at the headquarters of the Voronezh Front, the next day, July 13, reported to Comrade I.V. Stalin that (I quote) "during two days of fighting (The events of July 2 were distributed over two days, July 11 and 12. — Note by Akhmedov. — In fact, Vasilevsky sent his report on the night of July 14, and he spread the losses of the 5th Guards Tank Army on July 12 and 13. — B.S.) Rotmistrov's 29th tank corps lost 60% of its tanks irretrievably and temporarily out of order, and up to 30% of its tanks in the 18th corps." In fact, the total losses of the 29th Panzer Corps from the total number of tanks in the corps were 71%, and the 18th Panzer Corps - 46%. And not two days, but only for July 12. And in the main, these were irretrievably lost tanks, and not at all temporarily out of action. A. M. Vasilevsky prudently kept silent about the losses of other corps. Much was to be covered up. For example, an incorrectly chosen direction of the strike was against the strongest German grouping in the most unfavorable conditions for the 29th and 18th Panzer Corps. (It is still unclear why this blow was needed at all.) P. A. Rotmistrov insisted on this direction. The headquarters of the Voronezh Front was inclined to launch a counterattack from the bend of the Psel River to the village of Yakovlevo, however, the difficult terrain and swampy floodplain, coupled with the main enemy forces supposedly located here (Soviet commanders continued to be blissfully unaware of the real forces of the enemy and their location) forced P. A. Rotmistrov to abandon this option. The most promising was a strike from the positions occupied by the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, at the weakest point of the German defense with access to the rear of the German 2nd SS Tank Corps. The refusal of this decision (although the reconnaissance on the ground was nevertheless carried out) was apparently connected with self-doubt, which reigned both in the Stavka and in the headquarters of Voro.

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Nezhsky front, because then the main forces of the front would have to be removed from the direction of the German attack on Kursk and the threat of a German breakthrough to Prokhorovka became almost tangible. The victorious reports sent to Moscow had to be backed up with appropriate actions the next day. But by the morning of July 3, the command of the 5th Guards Tank Army managed to scrape together only 156 serviceable and combat-ready tanks on a front | 18-20 km long (that is, the density was 8-9 tanks per | km of front, On July 12, they were unable to break through the German defenses at a density of 50 tanks per | km of the front). In fact, the entire day of July 13, the command of the Voronezh Front simulated the continuation of the counterattack, "successfully" launched on July 12. Orders and directives were issued, decisively directing troops to attack. Troops advanced, concentrated, made short attacks in the direction of the enemy and immediately retreated to their previous positions. (For example, at 3.35 am on July 13, the commander of the 5th Guards Tank Army P. A. Rotmistrov gives combat order number 7 to the commander of the 2nd tank corps, demanding to launch an attack at 8.00 am, take possession of the Storozhevoye farm and report on execution At 6.40 am the order came to the headquarters of the 2nd tank corps, from the headquarters of the corps it arrived at the headquarters of the 99th tank brigade at 8.00 and the headquarters of the 58th motorized rifle brigade at 8.30 am The 99th tank brigade was able to prepare for the attack in [0.15, and the 58th motorized rifle brigade arrived at the starting points for an attack on positions only at 1400. What was in the distance was covered in darkness. From the documents of the 99th tank brigade it follows that, without waiting for the motorized riflemen, it twice tried to attack a well-fortified stronghold the Germans' point in the village of Storozhevoy, but to no avail. The parent organization, the headquarters of the 2nd Tank Corps, did not hear a word about all this, either in its internal documents, or in the operational report for July 13, sent to the headquarters of the 5th Guards Tank Corps. army. And headquarters

5th Guards Tank Army and does not require any report on the execution of order number 7. In a word, whoever wants to does it.) Command of the Voronezh Front

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8 - Sokolov

guessed that the enemy did not at all suffer the damage that was planned during the Soviet counterattack on July 12. The fear that the Germans were about to make a breakthrough (and then certainly not to take off their heads) was so great that N.F. Vatutin on the night of July 13 sent a cunningly worded cipher message to I.V. from the reserve one tank corps, one mechanized corps and one aviation assault corps. JV Stalin does not provide the requested corps and begins to suspect that he is being fooled by talking about the victory won. He cannot understand what the two armies just brought into battle, which include more than 100 thousand people and more than 800 tanks, are doing, and therefore instructs the Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief G.K. immediately fly to the Prokhorovka area, sort out the situation and take over the coordination of the actions of the Voronezh Front, and orders Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky to hand over his affairs and depart for the Southern Front. On the morning of July 13, G.K. Zhukov arrived at the command post of N.F. Vatutin and demanded that continuous attacks and counterattacks be continued with the available forces in order to pin down the enemy and prevent him from regrouping. But the available forces after the "victory" on July 12 were clearly not enough, and most of the attacks and counterattacks simply passed into the realm of mystification. On July 13, major battles took place only in the bend (on the western bank) of the Psel River, as a result of which the "Dead Head" division was forced to stop its offensive.

Here is the acquittal report of A. M. Vasilevsky: "According to your personal instructions, since the evening of 9.UP.43 I have been continuously in the troops of Rotmistrov and Zhadov in the Prokhorovka and southern directions. Until today, inclusive, the enemy continues mass tank attacks and counterattacks against our advancing tank units on the front of Zhadov and Rotmistrov. The liquidation of the breakthrough of Kryuchenko's army, which created a serious threat to the rear of the main forces of Rotmistrov's army and Zhadov's corps, required the allocation of two mechanized brigades from the 5th mechanized corps

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pus and separate parts of Rotmistrov to the Shakhovo, Avdeevka, Aleksandrovskaya districts. The liquidation of the breakthrough of Zhadov's army in the areas of Vesely, Vasilievka, Petrovka on 12.UP.43 forced the rest of the 5th mechanized corps to be thrown there. Both greatly weakened the forces of Rotmistrov's main attack from Prokhorovka in a southwestern direction. Based on observations of the ongoing battles and the testimony of prisoners, I conclude that the enemy, despite the huge losses in both human forces, and especially in tanks and aircraft, still does not give up the idea of breaking through to Oboyan and beyond. to Kursk, achieving this at any cost. Yesterday I myself personally observed a tank battle of our 18th and 29th corps with more than two hundred enemy tanks in a counterattack southwest of Prokhorovka. At the same time, hundreds of guns and all the RSs we have took part in the battle. As a result, the entire battlefield was littered with burning German and our tanks.

Over the course of two days of fighting, Rotmistrov's 29th Tank Corps lost 60% of its tanks irretrievably and temporarily disabled, and the 18th Corps lost up to 30% of its tanks. Losses in the 5th mechanized corps are insignificant. The next day, the threat of a breakthrough of enemy tanks from the south to the area of Shakhovo, Avdeevka, Aleksandrovka continues to be real. During the night, I take every measure to withdraw the entire 5th mechanized corps, the 32nd motorized brigade and four IPTAP regiments. Taking into account the large enemy tank forces in the Prokhorovka direction, here on 14.UP Rotmistrov's main forces, together with Zhadov's rifle corps, were assigned a limited task - to defeat the enemy in the Storozhevoye area, north of

Storozhevoe, state farm "Komsomolets", go to the line Gryaznoye - Yasnaya Polyana and all the more firmly secure the Prokhorovka direction.

The possibility of an oncoming tank battle is not ruled out here and tomorrow. In total, at least eleven tank divisions continue to operate against the Voronezh Front, systematically replenished with tanks. The prisoners interviewed today showed that the 19th tank division for

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today it has about 70 tanks in service, the Reich division has up to 100 tanks, although the latter has already been replenished twice since 5.7.43. The report was delayed due to the late arrival from the front. 2:47 p.m. 14.7.43. From the 5th Guards Tank Army.

Vasilevsky downplays the losses of the 5th Guards Tank Army and blows them over the top, while almost all of them actually fell on July 12, when the Battle of Prokhorov took place. This was an old technique, widely used even in the tsarist army, where often heavy losses suffered in one battle were scattered over several days. In order to reinforce the thesis of the two-day battle of the 5th Guards Tank Army before the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Rotmistrov outlined offensive actions on July 13, although he understood their senselessness from an operational point of view. True, the Germans did not notice these attacks, which only led to unnecessary losses.

On July 13, north of Kochetovka, in a section 5-6 km wide, infantry subunits of the Totenkopf division pressed the 66th and 97th Guards Rifle Divisions by |-1.5 km. Several tanks "Totenkopf" broke into the state farm. Voroshilov (6 km northwest of Prokhorovka).

The reconnaissance report of the headquarters of the Voronezh Front on July 14 stated: "In the BELENIKHINO-VISLOE sector, the actions of our units drove the enemy out of KALININ (southwest of BELENIZINO), SOBACHEVSKY, NECHAYEVKA and continued fighting for Smorodino (6 km east of BYKOVKA)...

Captured non-commissioned officer of the 339th brigade of the 167th brigade, captured on 13.7 in the BELENIKHINO area, testified: ".

This seemed to indicate that the direction of the offensive of the SS Panzer Corps should change and Prokhorovka was no longer its main goal. However, later in the intelligence report there is an erroneous assertion that in the region of height 220.6, east of Krasny Oktyabr, there is a Leibstandarte, while in fact the "Dead Head" was operating here. And in general, an erroneous conclusion was made in the intelligence report:

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"During 14.7 we can expect a concentric attack on PROKHOROVKA from the west and from south."

In fact, on July 14, the Reich division and the 7th Panzer Division launched counter attacks on the 183rd Rifle and 81st Guards Rifle Divisions and on the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, trying to encircle four rifle divisions in the Shakhovo area. divisions. The "Reich" division advanced in a sector 6-7 km wide to a depth of 6-7 km, occupying Belenikhino and Leski. Before meeting with the 7th Panzer Division in Shakhovo, the Reich still had about 5 km to go.

On the night of July 14, the German 7th Panzer Division, which had 24 tanks in service, crossed the Seversky Donets River near the village of Shcholokovo. The 19th tank division with 28 tanks crossed here earlier. The 6th Panzer Division, which had in service [4 tanks, and attached to it the 503rd

a separate tank battalion with 6 "tigers" and the 228th separate assault gun battalion with 14 vehicles advanced on Avdeevka, where they were opposed by the combined detachment of Major General K. G. Trufanov, who by the morning of July 14 had not less than 80 tanks and self-propelled guns, excluding armored vehicles of the 26th Guards Tank Brigade of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, which fought on the outskirts of the village of Shakhovo, and the 96th Tank Brigade, which was part of the 69th Army. At 21.30 on July 14, the 19th and 7th Panzer Divisions captured Shakhov. And at 0600 hours on July 15, the 19th Panzer Division linked up with the Reich Division. At 0850, the Germans captured the villages of Maloe Yablonovo and Plota, 6 km north of Shakhovo.

At 02:40 on July 15, Rotmistrov committed his last reserve, the 10th Guards Mechanized Brigade of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps, into battle with the demand to keep Shakhovo and Leski at all costs. (But both villages had already been taken by the enemy.)

On July 15, Reich, together with the 7th and 19th Panzer and 167th and 168th Infantry Divisions, tried to destroy the encircled 48th Rifle Corps of the 69th Army.

At 08:55 on July 15, Vatutin issued order No. 00105 to the commanders of the 5th Guards Tank and 69th Armies: "The enemy, due to the admitted carelessness of the commanders of the 5th Guards.

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tank and 69th armies, by the morning of July 15 captured Leski, Shakhovo, threatened the encirclement of the 375th, 93rd and 89th rifle divisions of the 69th army. In fact, the divisions were already surrounded by them together - the 81st Rifle Division, not mentioned by Vatutin. In the same order, Vatutin ordered Shakhovo to be recaptured and held "by all means". But neither the encircled nor the tankers of Rotmistrov could do this. Vatutin concealed the capture of Shakhovo by the enemy from Headquarters, informing the Supreme Commander-in-Chief in combat report No. 00228 at 24:00 that the 5th Guards Tank Army was defending at the previous lines, and the troops of the 69th Army were occupying a new defensive line.

Major General 3.3, commander of the 48th Rifle Corps, who had no connection with the command of the 69th Army and the Voronezh Front. On the night of July 14-15, Rogozny, on his own initiative and on his own responsibility, decided to break through, without waiting for the encirclement to thicken. Leaving the cover groups at the forefront, the 89th, 81st, 93rd Guards Rifle Divisions and the 375th Rifle Division in the rear guard left the encirclement, abandoning almost all the heavy equipment and vehicles they had. The corps, numbering 33,285 personnel as of July 10, 1943, irretrievably lost 10,659 people (including 1,584 people killed, 8,395 people missing - mainly when leaving the encirclement, 680 people - who left for unknown reasons and 3669 people wounded and sick. Probably, these data do not differ very much from the true value of the losses encircled. There are no data on the number of missing people for the 183rd Rifle Division, but some of the missing from other divisions were subsequently found alive. It can be assumed that both these factors approximately balance each other.

On the morning of July 15, the 2nd Guards Tank Corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army, with 32 tanks remaining in service, withdrew in disarray in the east and northeast to the villages of Zhimolostnoye and Pavorot, south of Prokhorovka. The Soviet command was still afraid

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that the Germans could capture Prokhorovka and continue the march to Kursk, when in fact the troops of Army Group South were only preparing the conditions for withdrawal. After liquidating the "cauldron" in the Shakhovo area, the Germans entered the rear defense line from Storozhevoye to Shipov for about 18-20 km, advancing up to 24 km. This was the last advance of the Germans during the Battle of Kursk.

On July 16, 1943, German troops began to withdraw on the southern face of the Kursk salient. Manstein succeeded in withdrawing the troops, for the most part, unimpeded, to the former well-equipped

engineering frontier. On the night of July 18, the SS Panzer Corps was withdrawn from the front, having 203 serviceable tanks, including 23 Tigers and 117 assault and anti-tank self-propelled guns. A few made an organized retreat. Panzer divisions were withdrawn from the battle sequentially and only after they surrendered the occupied lines to the infantry. The troops of the Voronezh Front, which suffered heavy losses, could not immediately go into pursuit and inflict any tangible losses on the retreating German troops.

On July 27, the Leibstandarte left for Italy, handing over tanks and heavy weapons to other SS divisions. They were transferred to the Donbass, where they participated in a counterattack, as a result of which the Germans on July 30 managed to liquidate the bridgehead on the Mius River captured by our troops, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

During the German retreat, the Soviet troops also suffered considerable losses. In some areas, individual battles of local importance continued until the start of the general offensive of the Voronezh Front on August 3. The 5th Guards Tank Army lost about 4,500 men between 21 and 31 July (43% of the total losses in July). This applies only to units of the 5th Guards Mechanized and 2nd Guards Tank Corps, since the main formations of Rotmistrov's army were withdrawn to the second echelon as early as July 15th. And on July 24, these two corps also handed over the occupied line to divisions of the 5th Guards Army and were withdrawn to the rear to put equipment in order. So on average two

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weakened corps of the 5th Guards Army and in pursuit managed to lose 1.5 thousand people daily. Unless, of course, we are dealing with the practice of scattering losses incurred in previous days. Zhadov's army, continuing to advance, from July 21 to July 31 lost about [] thousand people, including after July 23, the losses amounted to 7814 people, or a third of its total losses in July. The troops of the Steppe Front on July 20-31 lost over 34,000 soldiers and officers, while the troops of the Voronezh Front lost 15,500. And this is only according to official, probably underestimated data.

According to L. N. Lopukhovskiy, the losses of the Voronezh Front during the 19 days of the operation (excluding the 27th and 47th armies) amounted to about 140 thousand people (22.2% of its strength, taking into account the reserves transferred to it) , and the Steppe Front - 21 thousand people (4.7% of its strength at the beginning of the battle).

As L. N. Lopukhovskiy calculated, from July 10 to July 16 formations of the 5th Guards Army (without the 32nd Guards Rifle Corps), the 48th Rifle Corps of the 69th Army, the 5th Guards Tank Army and two motorized rifle brigades (5th Guards and 10th Tank Corps) lost up to 35 thousand soldiers and officers, including 6.5 thousand killed and 9.5 thousand missing.

As L. N. Lopukhovskiy showed, the data on the losses of the Voronezh Front in the Kursk defensive operation, published in the official publication of the Ministry of Defense "Secrecy Removed", are significantly underestimated. It says that in the period from July 5 to July 23, the Voronezh Front suffered the following losses of personnel:

Irrecoverable losses - 27,542

Sanitary losses - 46 350

Total losses - 73 892.

However, in the combat report of the headquarters of the Voronezh Front No. 01398 to the Chief of the General Staff about the losses from July 4 to 22, completely different figures are given:

Killed - 20,577

Missing - 25 898

Captured - 29

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Total irretrievable casualties - 46,504

Wounded - 54,427

Total human losses - 100,931.

The difference turns out to be 27,039 people, including an almost twofold difference in irretrievable losses - 19,033 people more.

Losses for the period from 4 to 16 July, according to the same report, amounted to 18,097 killed, 24,880 captured and missing, 47,272 wounded and sick. During the period of the persecution of Army Group South, which retreated to its former positions, the Voronezh Front lost 2,481 killed, 1,047 missing, and 7,155 wounded and sick.

Even more significant are the differences in data on irretrievable losses of military equipment. According to the collection "Secret Classification Removed", during the Kursk defensive operation, the troops of the Central, Voronezh and Steppe Fronts were irretrievably lost:

Tanks and self-propelled guns - 1614

Guns and mortars - 3229

Aircraft - 459.

However, the final combat report of the headquarters of the Voronezh Front states that in the period from July 5 to July 23, the troops of the front irretrievably lost:

Tanks and self-propelled guns - 1628

Guns and mortars - 3609

Aircraft - 387 (together with the wrecked).

It turns out that the Voronezh Front alone, according to its headquarters, irrevocably lost more tanks and artillery than all three fronts put together, and almost the same number of aircraft, only some 15.7% less.

L. N. Lopukhovsky noted that the data on casualties given in the report of the headquarters of the Voronezh Front are very close to the assessment of Soviet losses during the reflection of the Citadel, made at the headquarters of Army Group South. Manstein notes in his memoirs that by July 13, his troops had taken 24,000 prisoners, between July 13 and July 16 another 10,000, mainly during the liquidation of the "cauldron" in the Shaakhovo region. And according to the headquarters of the Voronezh Front, by July 16

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in the troops of the front there were 24,880 missing. According to Manstein, the Germans destroyed 1800 Soviet tanks by July 13, and according to the headquarters of the Voronezh Front, by July 16, 1888 tanks and self-propelled guns were irretrievably lost or knocked out. Soviet guns, as Manstein believed, his troops destroyed and captured 1347, and according to the headquarters of Vatutin, by July 16, 1605 guns were irretrievably lost.

It should be noted here that a comparison of Manstein's data with the data of the final report of the headquarters of the Voronezh Front proves that the latter significantly underestimate Soviet irretrievable losses. After all, the side that takes them usually knows more or less the number of prisoners.

less accurate. In the Red Army, among the missing were often not only prisoners, but also the dead, about whose death there was no conscientious information. And in any case, the presence of 34,000 Soviet prisoners by July 16 suggests that the number of missing people is underestimated by more than 9 thousand people. But, as L. N. Lopukhovskiy proved, the report of the headquarters of the Voronezh Front did not take into account the losses of the 7th Guards and 69th Armies in the period from July 5 to July 19, since these armies were transferred to the Steppe Front on July 20. The historian drew attention to the fact that, according to the monthly summary of losses for July, this month the front lost 99,596 people, including 19,658 killed, 16,704 missing and captured, 62,478 wounded and sick, and 756 disabled by other for various reasons (accidents, suicides, etc.). The fact that these losses turned out to be 1336 less than the losses for 19 days of the defensive operation, Lopukhovskiy explains by the fact that, perhaps, in the final report, at least some of those 6.4 thousand people were excluded from the missing. - missing, who to | | In August they were able to return to their units. But in the total losses of the Voronezh Front for July, the losses of the 7th Guards and 69th armies are taken into account. According to this document, the losses of the Voronezh Front amounted to 148,349 people. The difference between this figure and 99,596 people will give us the approximate losses of these two armies - 48,753 killed, wounded and missing. According to,

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cited by L. N. Lopukhovskiy, the 69th Army in the period from | By July 19, she lost 26,415, including 4,351 killed, 10,614 missing and captured, [141] wounded and sick (there were only 387 sick), and another 39 people were out of action for other reasons. The 7th Guards Army in the same period lost 28,578 people, including 6,086 killed, 3,975 missing and captured, 18,458 wounded and sick (the latter was only 591), as well as 59 people who were out of action for other reasons. If we add these losses to those losses that are listed in the report of the headquarters of the Voronezh Front for the period from February 4 to February 16, then the latter will increase to 28,534 killed, 33,469 captured and missing, and 77,239 wounded and sick (the last figure includes and retired for unknown reasons). Now the number of missing people turns out to be almost equal to the number of Soviet prisoners captured by Manstein's troops during the implementation of Operation Citadel from July 4 to July 16. However, according to L. N. Lopukhovskiy, by the end of July, 6.4 thousand who had previously been reported missing returned to the Voronezh Front. It can be assumed that at least 6,000 of those who returned went missing before 16 July. Then the number of those missing, who were captured or killed, will be reduced to 27.5 thousand (despite the fact that this figure also includes a certain, albeit insignificant, number of missing from the 7th Guards and 69th Army, falling on July 17, 18 and 19). Then it turns out that at least 7.5 thousand prisoners were not taken into account in the official irretrievable losses by the headquarters of the Voronezh Front. But at the same time, it seems completely unbelievable that only those who were taken prisoner were among the missing. Accounting for irretrievable losses in the Red Army was set up extremely poorly. Dead Red Army soldiers, about whose death there was no reliable data, were listed as missing. And many Red Army soldiers who died or were captured did not fall into the lists of irretrievable losses at all. The scale of the underestimation of Soviet losses is well illustrated by the following example. July 5, 1943, to the beginning of the Kursk

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battle, the troops of the Central Front, commanded by General of the Army K.K. Rokossovskiy, numbered 738 thousand people, and during the defensive battle until July 11, inclusive, they lost 15,336 people killed and missing, according to the collection "Secrecy stamp removed", and 18 56 | person. By the time the Red Army went on the offensive on Orel, on July 12, the composition of the troops of the Central Front had not changed much: one tank brigades had arrived and two rifle brigades had left. The tank brigade at that time numbered 1300 people, and in one rifle brigade there could be 3.5-4 thousand people, taking into account the fact that the number of rifle divisions of the Central Front at that moment averaged about 8 thousand . Human. With this in mind, by the beginning of the Oryol operation, the Central Front was supposed to have at least 697.4 thousand personnel. However, according to the authors of the book "Secrecy Removed", at that moment in the troops of Rokossovskiy there were only 645

300 people. This means that the true losses of the Central Front in the defensive battle near Kursk were at least 52.1 thousand more than official statistics confirm. And this is only on the condition that the troops of the Central Front did not receive marching reinforcements during the defensive operation. If such replenishment was received, then the real losses should have been even higher. Such a number of people could not immediately desert or simply disappear to no one knows where, and even in the conditions of fierce fighting!

It should be emphasized that the main part of the underestimated Soviet losses had to fall on irretrievable losses, primarily on the missing, since the wounded admitted to hospitals were counted much more accurately than the dead.

In view of the foregoing, the data on the losses of the Voronezh Front, contained in the report of its headquarters, also turn out to be underestimated, especially in terms of irretrievable losses. It can be assumed that among the missing dead there should have been at least as many as the prisoners. Then the true number of missing

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to conduct as part of the Voronezh Front in the period from 4 to 16 July can be estimated at 68 thousand people. In this case, the total losses of the front during the specified period can be estimated at [33.4 thousand people, irretrievable - at 86 thousand people.

Manstein estimated the number of Soviet soldiers killed between July 4 and 16 at [7,000], and the number of wounded at least 34,000. It turns out that in his estimates he underestimated Soviet sanitary losses by 1.4 times, and irretrievable losses by 1.7 times.

As Manstein notes, during the implementation of the Citadel, the troops of his army group lost 20,720 people, including 3,330 killed and missing.

However, Manstein's data may well underestimate German losses. The fact is that the entire Army Group South lost 34,236 men between 4 and 20 July, including 5,699 killed, 1,203 missing and 27,334 wounded. In addition, 318 people lost army units, for which the distribution of losses by category is unknown. Of these losses, one should exclude the losses of the 52nd Army Corps of the Kempf Army Group, which did not operate on the Citadel front. They amounted to 67 killed, three missing and 247 wounded. Then, taking into account the losses of units of army subordination, there will be about 5,686 killed, about 1,210 missing and 27,341 wounded, which in total gives a total loss of 34,337 people. These losses are 13,617 more than Manstein gives for the period from 5 to 16 July inclusive. It seems completely unbelievable that during the 4 days of the retreat, the troops of Army Group South lost only 34.3% less than during the 12 days of the offensive, when the fighting was much more intense. In addition, the number of wounded in the SS corps, as shown by L. N. Lopukhovskiy, should be increased by 483 people. This brings the total number of casualties to 27,824. It is more logical to make an estimate by determining the average daily losses for the period from 5 to 20 July. I excluded the day of July 4 from the calculations, since on that day private operations against the Soviet military outposts could not inflict heavy losses on the Germans, comparable in order to the losses on the main days of the offensive. Then it turns out

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that, on average, Manstein's troops lost 355 killed, 8 missing and 1,739 wounded per day. Then, for an approximate determination of the losses suffered through July 16, inclusive, it is necessary to subtract from the total figures 1420 killed, 32 missing and 6956 wounded. Then the total losses of the troops of the Army Group "South" participating in the "Citadel" in the period from 5 to 16 July can be estimated at 4266 killed, 1178 missing and 20 868 wounded, which gives a total loss of 26 312 people, which seems to be more true than the figures given by Manstein. However, it cannot be ruled out that his figures reflect data on losses by the morning of July 13, i.e., by the time of the meeting with Hitler, at which it was decided to stop

Operation Citadel. It is also possible that the field marshal did not include the missing among 3330. In further calculations, we will use the figure 26,312.

The ratio of the total losses of the Voronezh Front and

formations of the 4th Panzer Army of the Kempf Army Group in the period from July 4 to 16 can be estimated as 5.1:1, and for irrevocable - as 15.9:1, which, perhaps, is a record for the entire war. According to our estimate, the ratio of the dead alone is 15.6:1, which also, perhaps, is a record for the war. And the greatest contribution to this result was made by the II SS Panzer Corps. arcs against the Central Front of Rokossovsky, lost -- The German 9th Army, advancing until July 12 on the northern face of the Kursk about 20 thousand people during the offensive, according to the data cited in Manstein's memoirs. The total losses of the Central Front opposed to it in the period from July 5 to 11, we estimate at 86 thousand people, which gives a ratio of total losses of 4.3:1. The situation is more complicated when it comes to assessing the irretrievable losses of the Central Front. If we assume that in the unrecorded losses, which amounted to about 52.1 thousand people, the irretrievable and sanitary losses were related as 3:1, the irretrievable losses of the front will reach 54.4 thousand people, and sanitary - 31, 6 thousand Human.

There is no exact data on the irretrievable losses of the warmia of the Model. Assuming that in the 9th German army without a

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Since the gate and sanitary losses correlated approximately in the same proportion as the Manstein armies, according to the loss reports, the number of dead and missing in the 9th Army can be estimated at 4 thousand people. Then the ratio of irretrievable losses of the Central Front and the German 9th Army in the period from 5 to 11 July can be estimated as [3.6:1. The figures are also impressive, but they are inferior to Manstein's result.

It can be said that during the implementation of the Citadel, Manstein, Goth and Hausser acted more effectively than Kluge and Model. And not only their talents played a role here. Manstein was probably more talented than Kluge, but it is difficult to say how, for example, the talents of Model and Hausser or Model and Goth were related. In particular, Hausser undoubtedly had a very successful command of a tank corps in 1943. Later, when he led the 7th Army in Normandy, he could no longer win victories. However, Hausser, at least, managed to delay the advance of the landing Anglo-American troops for a long time, and then, albeit with heavy losses, break out of the encirclement. Model, on the other hand, successfully commanded the army in defensive battles during the "Citadel", but he did not manage to win victories in major offensive operations. At the end of the war, both Hausser and Model commanded army groups on the Western Front. Hausser, by timely withdrawal, contrary to the order of the Fuhrer, saved the remnants of Army Group G from destruction, for which he was removed from his post. Model, on the other hand, followed Hitler's orders to the end, remained with Army Group B in the Ruhr pocket and shot himself shortly before surrender. It is impossible to determine which of them in this case acted more correctly from the point of view of military art. After all, the matter took place in the last weeks of the war, when it was only a question of saving the lives of German soldiers, who anyway had to be captured sooner or later. Probably, not without reason, it is believed that Rokossovsky as a military leader was superior to Vatutin, but it is difficult to say how much this influenced the difference in the results of the actions of the two fronts in the defensive phase of the Battle of Kursk. Quite possible,

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that the decisive factor in achieving greater success for Manstein's troops in comparison with Kluge's troops was the fact that in Army Group South there were more tank divisions than in the 9th Model Army, and in the defense of the Voronezh Front there were more tank-dangerous directions than on Central front. And far from the last in importance was the fact that against the armies of Vatutin

there were elite panzer divisions - three divisions of the SS corps and the division "Grossdeutschland".

What kind of human losses did the SS Panzer Corps suffer during Operation Citadel? Between 5 and 16 July, he lost 1,467 killed, 166 missing, and 6,442 wounded. In fact, almost all of these losses were incurred up to and including July 16, since later the corps did not conduct active hostilities, the Aleibstandarte was generally withdrawn from the front. There is also a higher estimate of the number of wounded, given by L. N. Lopukhovskiy - 6925. It is based on the data of updated reports on the losses of the Gotenkopf and Reich divisions. We accept this estimate, which brings the total losses of the SS Corps to 8,578. In the battle [July 2], the SS corps lost, as we have already said, 149 killed, 33 missing and 660 wounded, this amounted to about 9.8% of all losses suffered during the 12 days of the Citadel. The average daily losses were 8.3%, so that on the day of the famous battle, the average losses of the corps were only [1.18 times. In terms of irretrievable losses, on July 12, the SS men lost [1.1% of all losses, which exceeds the average by only 1.34 times. Not a very impressive result from the introduction of two fresh armies, tank and combined arms!

The main enemy of the SS Panzer Corps, the 5th Guards Tank Army, lost 9,945 men between July 12 and July 18, of which 4,841 were irretrievably lost (these figures do not include the losses of the 2nd Guards Tank and 2nd tank corps). The vast majority of losses occurred on [July 2. Indeed, already on July 15, the army, with the exception of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps and some units of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps, was withdrawn to the second echelon of Voronezh

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front. On July 12, the losses of the 5th Guards Tank Army (without the 2nd Guards Tank and 2nd Tank Corps), according to L.N. Lopukhovskiy, amounted to 6086 people, including: 1585 killed and 786 missing without a trace. In addition, the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, which fought against the Reich, lost 1432 people on July 12, including 485 dead and 7 missing. The divisions of the 5th Guards Army, which fought on July 12 against the SS divisions (the 9th Guards Airborne, 42, 52, 95 and 97th Guards Rifle Divisions and the 11th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 10th tank corps), according to L. N. Lopukhovskiy, lost 8717 people on July 12, including 2237 killed and 670 missing. Now we need to exclude the losses of the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps from the losses of the 5th Guards Tank Army. Between 12 and 16 July, the corps lost 2,172 men, including 690 killed and 345 missing. Unlike other formations of Rotmistrov's army, the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps actively participated in the battles even after July 12. So suppose that on July 12 only half of his losses of 1086 people, including 345 killed and 173 missing, are accounted for. Then the losses of the 5th Guards Tank Army in the fight against the 2nd SS Tank Corps can be estimated at 5,000 people, including 1,240 killed and 613 missing. And in total, the 5th Guards Tank Army, the 2nd Guards Tank Corps and divisions of the 5th Guards Army in the fight against the Hausser Corps lost about 15,149 people on July 12, including 3,962 killed and 1,290 missing. without a trace. The number of missing people exceeds the number of prisoners taken by the SS that day - 968 people and therefore seems close to reality, although some underestimation cannot be ruled out. This gives a ratio with the losses of the II SS Panzer Corps (842 men, including 149 killed and 33 missing) of 18:1 in total losses and 28.9:1 in irretrievable losses. Undoubtedly, this was one of the most unfortunate battles of the Second World War for the Red Army, including the unfortunate "winter war" with Finland.

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The results of the SS Panzer Corps on July 12 in terms of total human losses are 3.5 times better, and in terms of irretrievable losses, 1.8 times better than the results of the entire Army Group South in Operation Citadel. This is one of the proofs that, on average, the SS men fought more effectively than the Wehrmacht divisions, although they suffered significantly higher losses.

We also note that the losses of the SS corps in the operation "Citadel" (8578 people) turned out to be 1.3 times less than the losses in the February-March battle for Kharkov (11,519). This is due to the longer duration of the Kharkov battle. There, the SS divisions fought for about 48 days, although different divisions fought at different times, so the average duration of the operation for the corps as a whole can be estimated at 30-35 days. The corps participated in the Citadel for only 12 days. Therefore, based on an average day of fighting, the losses of the Hausser corps during the offensive on Kursk turn out to be approximately twice as high as during the second Kharkov battle.

The optimal course of action for the Red Army in the Battle of Kursk would probably have been a tough defense. Then the enemy's machine guns would fight first of all with artillery, as well as own tanks, but acting not in a frontal attack, but in defense, from ambushes, dug into the ground or hidden behind obstacles and natural obstacles. Characteristically, of all the German tank divisions in the offensive against Kursk, the 19th tank division suffered the greatest irretrievable losses in tanks, which had to act against the Soviet infantry, and not tank formations. She irrevocably lost 23 tanks, destroying only 57 Soviet ones. The Soviet tank troops, as well as the Red Army as a whole, in terms of their level of training were more suitable for an easier form of combat - defense, than for a more complex - offensive.

During Operation Citadel, the SS Panzer Corps acted most successfully of all the German corps and inflicted the greatest losses in men and equipment on the opposing Soviet armies, both in absolute numbers and in terms of

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in relation to their own losses. However, the goal of the "Citadel" in the form of an encirclement of the main Soviet forces in the Kursk ledge could not be achieved, and the time for this operation had expired. The only significance of the combat operations of the SS Corps, as well as other formations of the Army Group South, was that the general offensive of the Voronezh and Steppe Fronts had to be postponed until August 3rd.

The SS Corps was urgently needed to eliminate a number of new crises. Initially, the entire SS corps was supposed to be transferred to Italy, where, after the Anglo-American troops landed in Sicily on July 10, 1943, the fascist regime of Mussolini staggered. However, the situation on the Eastern Front made it possible to send only the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler division to the Apennines. Two other divisions of the SS Panzer Corps were sent to liquidate the Soviet bridgehead on the Mius, which threatened to encircle the German troops in the Donbass.

THE BATTLE ON THE MIUS FRONT AND THE COUNTERSHOT UNDER THE BODY SPIRIT

The offensive of the Soviet Southern Front at the turn of the Mius River in July 1943 was aimed at preventing the transfer of German reserves to the Kharkov direction, and in case of success of the offensive, in cooperation with the Southwestern Front, to defeat the enemy's Donbass grouping and liberate the southern regions Ukraine and Crimea.

The main blow was supposed to be delivered by the forces of the 5th shock, 28th and 2nd guards armies in the center from the Rovenka area in the direction of Uspenskaya, Artemovka, Fedorovka. Auxiliary strikes were delivered by part of the forces of the 51st Army on the right wing and the 44th Army, on the left wing of the front. The weak point was the absence of tank armies in the front. Reinforcements included the 2nd and 4th Guards Mechanized Corps, the 11th Tank Corps, and the 4th Cavalry Corps. However, the forces of the German 6th Army opposing the Southern Front were relatively small - 10 infantry and 1 airfield division is far from full strength, of which 7 infantry and 1 airfield division VISION. .

On July 16, on the day the offensive of the armies of the Southern Front began, Manstein was forced to stop the offensive on Kursk and begin to withdraw troops to their former lines in order to free up forces to eliminate the Soviet bridgehead on the Mius. For this operation were intended and not introduced-

the reserve 24th tank corps, which was included in the battle for Kursk, as part of the SS Panzer Division "Viking" and the two remaining on

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Eastern front of the division of the 2nd SS Panzer Corps - "Reich" and "Gotenkopf".

Former Chief of Staff of the Southern Front, Marshal S.S. Biryuzov recalled: "July 16, 1943 was a hot, completely calm day. By the appointed time, the commander and I arrived at the observation post.

All preparations for the offensive were completed. The last echelons of night bombers were returning from a combat mission. Artillery preparation began almost immediately. The front line of the enemy defense was shrouded in black clouds of smoke and dust. And our dive bombers and attack aircraft were already buzzing over our heads. They rushed to the same place! ..

We really had a hard time. Despite the heroism of the troops, the offensive developed very slowly. The strongest resistance was offered by enemy strongholds located west of Dmitrievka and in the area of Marinovka. Here, strong reinforced concrete fortifications were not hit by artillery, and the advancing units suffered heavy losses.

In the afternoon, having somewhat recovered from the shock, the German troops began to launch counterattacks in some directions. Tank reserves approached them from the nearest rear. Many of the destroyed firing points came to life. However, in the direction of the main attack - in the area of Yasinovsky and Alekseevka - we managed to break through the first line of enemy trenches.

In order to delay the further advance of our troops, the German command transferred the 16th motorized division, which was preparing to be sent to Kursk, to the breakthrough site, and immediately brought it into battle. Units of the 111th and 336th Infantry Divisions hurried here in motor vehicles from the south, and the 32nd Division and the non-commissioned officer school of the 6th Army from the north. And on July 19, our reconnaissance established that the 23rd Panzer Division had been returned from its route to the Kharkov direction (in fact, the 23rd Panzer Division, together with the Viking SS Panzer Division, as part of the 24th Panzer Corps

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Pusa was put into action in the area of Izyum to localize the Soviet foothold on the Donets. - B.S.).

- This is already half the victory, - stated Alexander Mikhailovich (Vasilevsky, as a representative of the Stavka. - B.S.).

His optimism was transferred to us. But at the same time, we felt that our 5th shock and 28th armies were starting to run out of steam. To develop the offensive, it was decided to introduce the second echelon of the front - the 2nd Guards Army.

It moved forward beautifully, under the cover of aircraft from the air and anti-aircraft gunners from the ground. However, in the future, its actions were not energetic enough, and a decisive turning point in the course of our offensive did not occur.

Even at the time when the 2nd Guards Army was approaching the front, in the zone of operations of the 5th Shock Army, the enemy brought into action the SS divisions "Totenkopf", "Reich" and the 3rd Panzer that had been transferred from the Belgorod direction. At the same time, the German bomber aviation unleashed powerful bombing strikes on the battle formations of this army, as well as on the 2nd Guards. The bombers acted one by one. In each echelon, there were up to 100-120 Yu-87 aircraft. From time to time Xe-111 appeared over the battlefield.

In one day, the enemy made more than 3,000 sorties against the troops of the 2nd Guards and 5th Shock Armies. This entailed significant losses on our part and slowed down the pace of the offensive even more....

I met the commander of the 2nd Guards Army, General Kreizer, in a trench recently recaptured from the enemy. He reported the situation and nodded to the sky:

We can't raise our heads.

At that moment, as if to confirm his words, a new wave of enemy bombers appeared.

- Where is the second guards mechanized corps of Sviridov now? I inquired.

Kreizer pointed out his location on the map and added with a sigh that the position of this corps for him sa

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It is not clear enough: the radio connection with Sviridov is broken, and it is impossible to get there.

I was deeply dissatisfied with this report. It seemed that he reported to me inaccurately, and, despite the incessant bombing, I decided to make my way to Sviridov myself. It turned out to be really difficult and very risky business. Along the way, I had to repeatedly leave the car and lie in the bomb craters, waiting for the next raid.

But at the command post of the corps, everything turned out differently. It was calm here. German planes flew over the positions of the corps and did not touch them, but bombed, mainly from behind, the troops of other corps, which were somewhat lagging behind and tried in vain to move forward.

- Why did you stop? What right do you have to this? I pounced on Svirilov.

Instead of answering, he handed me a notebook of telephone conversations, in which the order given by Comrade. Sviridov personally comrade. Cruiser: the offensive is temporarily suspended.

This ran counter to the decision of the commander of the front and jeopardized the entire front operation. In the most categorical form, I ordered Sviridov to resume the offensive.

Just then, radio contact with the Communist Party was restored. I called comrade. Kreizer, and we had a very unpleasant conversation with him. Then I managed to get in touch with F.I. Tolbukhin. He, too, was indignant at the delay of the 2nd Mechanized Corps and confirmed my order to continue the decisive offensive. However, the enemy took advantage of our delay, brought up even more armored units and intensified massive air strikes against the troops of the 2nd Guards, 5th Shock and 28th armies. Protracted bloody battles began, which lasted seventeen days without a break. Every meter of land was recaptured from the enemy with incredible efforts.

On the afternoon of July 30, our units defending Stepanovka were subjected to a simultaneous counterattack by 100 German tanks with infantry. On the morning of July 31

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two kilometers northeast of Stepanovka, up to 150 tanks and assault guns launched a counterattack. It turned out to be even harder for us | and 2 August. The sun was hot, the earth was fuming, and the rumble of tank and aircraft engines was all the time over the battlefield.

At the cost of huge sacrifices, the Germans again managed to stop the advance of our troops on the Mius. Seeing the futility of further attempts to break through the Mius positions of the enemy with the forces at our disposal, the front command decided to withdraw the troops to their original position - to the line from where seventeen days ago we launched the offensive.

What was the reason for these failures? First of all, of course, in the indecisiveness of the actions of the troops of the second echelon of the front - the 2nd Guards Army. But in fairness, it should be said that we were somewhat hasty with the introduction of the second echelon into battle.

Biryuzov's memoirs make clear the reasons for the failure of the Soviet troops in the battle on the Mius River. This is insufficient reconnaissance of enemy positions, the inability of artillery and aviation during artillery fire to suppress enemy firing points, which, in a year and a half of defense on the Mius, from November 1941, managed to create a number of long-term fortifications. In addition, the auxiliary strikes had no success and could not divert the German forces from the direction of the main attack. The dominance of the Luftwaffe in the air played its role, as well as the hasty and poorly organized entry into battle of the 2nd echelon - the 2nd Guards Army. The defeat was facilitated by the poor communication of the front headquarters with the headquarters of the armies and the headquarters of the armies with the headquarters of the corps, which made it difficult to respond quickly to the German counterattack.

It should also be added here that the German counterattack on the Mius was a complete surprise for the Soviet command. As early as July 17, the day when the Soviet offensive on the Mius began, the commander of the Voronezh Front, N.F. Vatutin, believed that the German offensive on Kursk would continue. Then Soviet intelligence

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ryala from sight of the II SS Panzer Corps and was then unpleasantly surprised to find it against the Southern Front.

Manstein recalled: "On July 17, the enemy, as expected, launched an offensive on the Donetsk and Miussky fronts (on the Miussky front, the offensive began the day before. — B.S.). In the area of the 6th and 1st Panzer Armies, the enemy carried out significant, albeit local, breakthroughs. In connection with this situation, the command of the group managed to keep, at least for use in the Donbass region, along with the 24th Tank Corps, which had already turned to the Donbass, also the SS tank corps intended by Hitler for Italy ...

On both sectors he penetrated deeply into our defenses, but he did not succeed in making a breakthrough.

The 6th Army, having committed both mobile formations left as a reserve in the Donets region, was able to stop the enemy offensive after he captured a bridgehead about 20 km wide and 15 km deep on the western bank of the Mius to the north of Kuibyshev.

On the sector of the 1st Panzer Army, the enemy managed to cross the Donets southeast of Izyum in a zone up to 30 km. But thanks to the introduction of both divisions of the 24th Tank Corps, which approached from Kharkov, we stopped the further advance of the enemy south of the river.

If we managed to stop the enemy offensive at the end of July, the situation in the Donbass remained very unstable.

After Operation Citadel was finally terminated by Hitler's order on July 17 by the Yug group, the command of the group decided to temporarily remove large tank forces from this flank in order to restore the situation in the Donbass with the help of these units ... Hitler again returned to the group for a counterattack in the Donbass (but only for this) the SS tank corps, which he intended for Italy ...

Since both corps and 4 tank divisions destined for the Donbass could only arrive one by one, the command of the group intended to restore the situation in the sector of the 1st Tank Army south of the Donets with a short

by two divisions of the first echelon of the SS corps. With a strike by all tank forces, we were then to liquidate a large enemy bridgehead in the zone of the 6th Army and again restore the front on the Mius. Hitler, however, without any explanation forbade the operation in the zone of the 1st Panzer Army, although these actions did not in any way delay the stay of the corps in the Donbass...

On July 30, in the area of \u200b\u200boperations of the 6th Army, a counterattack began - rolled wire, approaching from the northern flank of the group. It led to a complete restoration of the situation at the Mius line. The balance of forces in this battle was characteristic of the situation at that time, but it once again showed the superiority of the German army. The enemy had at least 16 rifle divisions, two mechanized corps, one tank brigade, and two anti-tank destroyer brigades in his foothold. Only 4 tank divisions, one motorized division and 2 infantry divisions took part in our counterattack. As a result of their attacks and the German counterattack, the enemy lost about 18,000 prisoners, 700 tanks, 200 guns and 400 anti-tank guns.

Forbidding the use of two SS Panzer divisions for a counterattack on the Donets, Hitler had his own reasons. He rightly considered the bridgehead on the Mius much more dangerous than the bridgehead on the Donets. From it, an exit could be made to the deep rear of Army Group A, which threatened not only the loss of Donbass, but also the encirclement of significant German forces. If these divisions had first been used on the Donets, they would have been largely bled there, they would have lost part of their tanks, and the attack on the Mius bridgehead would have been weakened and would not have reached the goal. After all, the SS Panzer Corps was the main striking force of the counter-attack. The Leibstandarte, who had left for Italy, left his armored vehicles to the two remaining divisions.

Kurt Tippelskirch in his "History of the Second World War" assessed the results of the counterattack on the Mius as follows:

major local actions against the right flank of the 8th field army, as well as against the 1st tank and 6th field armies, united for some time in army group "A". On the Seversky Donets, on both sides of the Izyum and west of Voroshilovgrad, these attacks were repulsed. On the Mius River in the Kuibyshevo region, the Russians managed to penetrate deeply into the defenses of the 6th Army. Since the penetration assumed a threatening character, the command of the army group had to throw large reserves to the rescue of the 6th Army. On July 30, with the forces of three infantry, four tank and one grenadier motorized divisions, the 6th Army launched a counterattack, which ended very successfully. In the course of fierce three-day battles, it was possible to return the area 20 km wide and 10 km deep captured by the Russians, and on August 2, the 6th Army returned to its previous positions on the Mius River. The Russians, in addition to heavy losses in killed and wounded, lost almost 18 thousand prisoners and a large amount of equipment. Nevertheless, using large forces, they pinned down the German reserves in a sector that they did not consider the most decisive.

When describing the course of the Mius battle on July 17-August 2, 1943, we will use the data of A. V. Isaev's study "Breakthrough of the Mius-Front". During the Miussk Offensive Operation, the Southern Front launched an offensive, inflicting two main blows with the main forces of six out of seven rifle divisions, one tank regiment and one tank regiment of the 5th shock army and exactly the same grouping of the 28th army on July 17 from the border Dmitrievka, Kuibyshevo, Novo-Yasinovsky. His ultimate goal was Taganrog. An auxiliary strike by forces of three of the seven rifle divisions of the 51st Army and one tank brigade was launched on the right wing of the front from the M. Nikolaevka, Orlovo area in the direction of Petrovo, Krasnoselye, in order to divert German reserves here. At the second stage, the troops of the Southern Front were supposed to reach the Elanchik River in order to defeat the Donbass in cooperation with the Southwestern Front.

enemy grouping. The 5th shock army advanced in the area of Dmitrievka, and the 28th in the area of Kuibyshevo. On the site of the 28th Army, it was planned to bring the 2nd Guards Army into battle (6 riflemen

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divisions, two mechanized corps) to develop success in the southwestern direction. The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps of this army included the 1543rd heavy self-propelled artillery regiment, which had 12 SU-152 and 1 KV. On its right flank, the 44th Army was to carry out a demonstration of the offensive with the forces of one rifle regiment in order to assist the neighboring 28th Army. One anti-tank and one tank brigades, as well as three fortified areas, remained in the reserve of the Southern Front. The actions of the front were supported by the 8th Air Army.

In the German 6th Army opposing the Southern Front, General of the Infantry Karl Hollidt, there were 8 infantry, one airfield, one mountain ranger and one motorized (panzer-grenadier) division, as well as five battalions of assault guns. One of the infantry divisions, the 335th, was operating against the Southwestern Front.

The first day of the offensive showed that it did not come as a surprise to the Germans, whose aerial reconnaissance as early as July 15 detected the concentration of Soviet troops in the attack areas. The offensive was also hampered by the fact that the western bank of the Mius dominated the eastern one, and the presence of numerous ravines and gullies limited the use of tanks. Nevertheless, initial success was achieved. Parts of the 294th and 306th infantry divisions came under attack from four rifle divisions and the 32nd Guards Tank Brigade (53 tanks) of the 51st Army. By 14.00, the dominating heights were taken, and the Soviet divisions advanced to a depth of 2 to 6 km.

Things were worse for the shock grouping of the 28th Army, which struck at units of the 336th and 294th Infantry Divisions. Here the offensive developed more slowly, in particular, because the Soviet infantry did not have time to use the artillery barrage to force the river. The army divisions were able to advance only 1-2 km and were stopped on the crest of the heights on the banks of the Mius. In this regard, the command of the Southern Front decided to bring the entire 2nd Guards Army into the offensive zone of the 5th Shock Army, while it was originally planned to introduce the 2nd Guards

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two groupings in the sectors of both armies of the first echelon.

At 1700, units of the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps approached the Mius in the Dmitrievka area and began crossing. German dive bombers and large-caliber artillery were thrown against him. As a result of air strikes, 2 tanks and 3 vehicles were knocked out, and the losses of the corps amounted to 18 killed and 46 wounded. At 18.00 the main forces of the corps were on the western coast. The 4th Guards Mechanized Brigade managed to capture the dominant height of 213.9 on the move, and the 6th Guards Mechanized Brigade started a battle for Marinovka. In the evening, the 13th Guards Rifle Corps of the 2nd Guards Army also set out to cross the Mius. According to the headquarters of the Southern Front, its troops lost up to 1800 people killed and wounded on the first day of the offensive. In fact, the losses were much higher. The 5th shock army, according to incomplete data, lost 225 killed and 484 wounded, as well as 8 KV, 11 T-34, 2 T-70 and 2 T-60 tanks. The 38th Army suffered more serious losses - 577 dead and 1823 wounded. Tank units of the army irretrievably lost 2 KV, 1 T-60s. Another T-34 and 1 T-60s drowned while crossing the Mius. 8 KV, 4 T-34s were shot down. Together with the losses of the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps, about which there is only incomplete data, the losses of the Southern Front amounted to at least 920 killed and 2353 wounded, i.e. at least 3273 people. And this is without the missing, who also probably had a certain number. German losses were, according to the headquarters of the 6th Army, 2116 killed, wounded and missing.

On the first day of the offensive, 374 aircraft of the Soviet 8th Air Army made 770 sorties, to which the enemy responded with only 350. Soviet losses amounted to only

6 aircraft.

The auxiliary strike of the 51st Army was not successful. Its troops shot down enemy outposts, but stopped in front of a minefield. To gnaw through minefields and repel counterattacks to the 54th Rifle Corps of the 51st Army

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moose on 18 and 19 July. By July 20, parts of the German 302nd and 306th Infantry Divisions restored their original positions. During this time, the 54th Corps lost 1571 killed, 207 missing and 5516 wounded, for a total of 7382 people. Continuing the attacks that had become meaningless until July 27, the corps lost another 205 killed, 5 missing and 903 wounded, for a total of 1113 people. Supporting the 54th Rifle Corps, the 6th Guards Tank Brigade lost 256 killed and wounded, as well as 3 KVs, 18 T-34s and IT-70s.

By 13:00 on July 18, units of the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps occupied Stepanovka and Marinovka. The 4th Guards Mechanized Brigade occupied Saur-Mogilsky, but was stopped by units of the 306th Infantry Division. The Germans held the barrow Saur Mogila dominating the area. By mistake, Saur-Mogilsky was fired upon by the 5th Guards Mechanized Brigade, which forced the 4th Guards Mechanized Brigade to leave the village, having lost 36 killed and 211 wounded from both German and "friendly" fire.

The counterattack of the 16th motorized division only slowed down the advance of the troops of the 51st shock army, without bringing tangible results.

Despite the general failure of the first day of the offensive, on July 18 the 28th Army continued to advance in the same direction. Its offensive began at 0600, but soon the soldiers of the 28th Army had to repel enemy counterattacks. But the fighting was no longer as fierce as on the first day, and infantry losses were reduced. The 28th Army lost 183 killed and 301 wounded. But the losses of the tank troops, on the contrary, increased. On July 18, the 33rd Guards Tank Brigade lost 5 tanks burned, 5 knocked out and 6 blown up by mines. Supporting the 271st and 320th Rifle Divisions, the 1st Guards Heavy Tank Regiment kept one tank in service by the end of the day. The rest of the KVs were blown up by mines. The infantry practically lost support from tanks.

Faced with difficulties, the command of the Southern Front decided to change the direction of the main attack. On the night of July 18-19, the 28th Army regrouped on

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right flank, closer to the direction of the offensive of the 5th shock army. Instead of breaking through a wide gap with two parallel blows, the Southern Front proceeded to expand the penetration of the 5th Shock Army. Now the troops of the 28th Army were to advance to the southwest from the Kuibyshevo region. Also, the 4th mechanized corps was ordered "no later than 3.00 19.7.43 to transport units to the west bank of the river Mius", in order to further advance in a south-western direction with the task of "together with units of 28 A, to surround and destroy the Kuibyshev grouping."

In the meantime, having occupied Stepanovka and Marinovka, the 2nd mechanized corps, by the end of July 18, took Garany and heights 230.9 and 214.3 to the west and northwest of Stepanovka. On July 19, the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps was supposed to leave the Krynka creek and prevent the enemy from organizing a defense on this advantageous line and seizing bridgeheads on the western bank. The 13th Guards Rifle Corps was to defend the right flank of the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps from the side of Snezhnoye. The 1st Guards Rifle Corps, instead of developing the offensive of the southern shock group, was transferred to Dmitrievka.

On the evening of July 18, the 23rd Panzer Division was included in the 6th German Army along with the headquarters of the KhZhU of the tank corps of Walter Nering. Manstein advised the commander of the 6th Army

Karl Hollidt to use the division for mobile defense in order to buy time for the transfer of two SS divisions from Belgorod. But the defense of the 6th Army was in a difficult position. The penetration of the 5th shock army could not be eliminated by a counterattack by the 306th infantry division, and the latter had to move away from Stepanovka and height 213.9. The 294th Infantry Division generally retreated in disarray and had to be reinforced by motorized infantry from the 16th Panzer-Grenadier (Motorized) Division. In the meantime, air formations from the southern front of the Kursk Bulge began to arrive to the aid of the 6th Army. Already on July 15, the III group of the 3rd fighter squadron "Udet" was transferred. The next day, the I group of the Uldeta squadron also arrived.

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Hollidt decided to use the new air groups to gain air supremacy and protect the dive bombers that were to support the 23rd Panzer Division's counterattack on 19 July. This division was to attack along the Snezhnoye-Marinovka road and take Hill 213.9, which dominated the Soviet bridgehead. At the same time, the 16th Panzer Grenadier Division was to capture Stepanovka in order to secure the 23rd Panzer Division from a flank attack. The object of attack of the 23rd Panzer Division was the 31st Rifle Corps of the 5th Shock Army.

On July 19, the 16th Motorized Division, which had 20 tanks left in service, attacked Stepanovka, in front of which it collided with the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps, which was advancing to the southwest. As a result of the tank battle, 15 out of 20 German tanks, according to Soviet data, were hit, and the surviving vehicles retreated. The motorized infantry of the 16th Motorized Division attacked units of the 13th Guards Rifle Corps, but had no success.

The 23rd Panzer Division also attacked Stepanovka, but was met with dense fire from Hill 213.9 and lost, according to Soviet data, 28 tanks out of 50.

After the failure of the German counterattack, the 4th Guards Mechanized Brigade resumed attacks on Saur-Mogilsky and took it, and by 17.00, together with the 37th Tank Brigade, captured the village of Garany.

The German counterattacks, having failed, nevertheless slowed down the advance of the 5th shock and 2nd guards armies. Tolbukhin was dissatisfied with the slow development of the offensive and at 11.30 on July 20 issued a formidable directive criticizing the command of the 2nd Guards Army and its corps for poor organization of interaction and inaccurate reports on the situation. The losses of the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps for July 17-19 amounted to 923 killed and wounded and 48 tanks destroyed and burned (40 T-34s and 8 T-70s). During these days, the 28th Army lost 1,570 killed and 5,355 wounded, and the entire Southern Front - 2,408 killed and 10,390 wounded. 132 tanks were lost, including 26 irrevocably. 8th

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The air army lost 19 aircraft on July 19, which exceeded its total losses for the previous two days.

On July 19, the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps, which still remained in the Dmitrievka area, was bombed. He lost 60 killed, 4 missing and 143 wounded. 3 T-34s and 13 vehicles burned down, and 8 T-34s, 1 armored car, 1 "Katyusha" and 13 vehicles were damaged. The reason for such large losses was the lack of air cover for the hull. The command of the front was clearly in a hurry with the withdrawal of the 4th Guards Corps to the crossings over the Mius, being unable to bring it into battle because of the slow advance of the formations already on the bridgehead. The th Guards Rifle Corps was also inactive.

On July 20, the 13th Guards Rifle Corps, having launched an offensive at night, was to capture Kalinovka and the Malopetrovsky farm by morning in order to ensure the entry into battle of the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps, which was to reach the Krynka River by the end of the day.

In the meantime, the German 23rd Panzer Division captured Saur-Mogilsky at 19:00, but at 23:30 it was driven out from there by the 4th and 5th Guards Mechanized Brigades. The 13th Guards Rifle Corps of General P.G. Chanchibadze was able to launch an offensive only in the afternoon of July 20, but met stubborn resistance from the 16th Motorized Division. The 4th Guards Mechanized Corps of General T.I. Tanaschishin again failed to enter the battle. On this day, he again lost from air strikes 2 T-34s and 2] car damaged. Another 19 cars burned down. Corps losses amounted to 57 people, and another 52 soldiers were wounded. At 5.30 on July 21, Tanaschishin's corps was finally brought into battle. The Germans transferred part of the artillery against him from the area of the 294th Infantry Division, which had previously repulsed the attacks of the 28th Army. The offensive of the latter almost ceased, as it had very few armored vehicles left. On this day, two divisions of the 28th Army attacked Yelizavetinsky, which changed hands several times. But the artillery fire of the Germans from the band of the 28th Army

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inflicted heavy losses on the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps, which lost 239 killed and 709 wounded. In addition, 21 T-34s and 2 T-70s were burned.

In the meantime, air support from the 8th Air Army, which was suffering from an acute shortage of fuel, weakened. On July 20, 228 aircraft made 332 sorties, losing 7 aircraft. On July 21, 322 aircraft made 550 sorties, which cost the loss of 11 aircraft. More until the end of the battle on the Mius, Soviet aviation never overcame the bar of 500

departures.

On July 22, the [th Guards Rifle Corps was to replace the 2nd Guards Mechanized and 13th Guards Rifle Corps in the Saur-Mogilsky, Lugansky area. But it failed.

On July 22, the headquarters of the German XXX Panzer Corps took command of the 16th motorized and 23rd tank divisions, as well as a number of combat groups deployed to repel the Soviet offensive from the unattacked sectors of the front of the 6th German army.

By that time, only 85 out of 217 tanks and self-propelled guns remained in service in the Soviet 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps. After a long but ineffective artillery and aviation preparation, he continued his attacks towards the Krynka River, fighting the 23rd Panzer Division. The Soviet tanks were covered by a smoke screen placed from the air. The 3rd Guards Rifle Division was unable to capture the dominating mound Saur-Mogila. However, the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps still managed to make a deep breakthrough. But the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps acted unsuccessfully. Only by the evening of July 22 did it reach the northwestern outskirts of Kalinovka, where it was met by fire from anti-tank, anti-aircraft and assault guns. The corps irretrievably lost 23 T-34s, 4T-70s and 15 vehicles. Another 21 T-34s, 5 T-70s and 21 vehicles were damaged. The casualties of the 4th Guards Corps on July 21-22 amounted to 317 killed and 1,320 wounded. The failure of the corps was due to the fact that the Germans managed to cut off the Soviet infantry from the tanks.

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The tanks, on the other hand, ended up in an area previously shot by German artillery and suffered heavy losses.

The Soviet infantry operated more successfully. By the end of July 22, the divisions of the 3rd Guards Rifle Corps captured Semenovskiy, Kalinovka and Elizavetinsky. At the same time, the 87th Guards Rifle Division lost [02] killed and 79 wounded.

On July 22, Soviet aviation sent 230 aircraft into action, making 420 sorties. In this case, 22 cars were lost.

The success of the German defense against the Miussky bridgehead was determined by the fact that they managed to pull significant artillery forces, including anti-aircraft artillery, to the breakthrough site from the unattacked sectors of the 6th Army front, as well as the active use of aviation against Soviet motorized infantry and tanks. Therefore, the 2nd Guards Army of General Ya.G. Kreizer and the 5th Shock Army of General V.D. Tsvetaeva were never able to realize their almost fivefold superiority in the number of infantry. As for the 28th Army of General V.F. Gerasimenko, its offensive actually stopped.

On July 23, the 2nd Guards Army made its last attempt to break through the enemy defenses with the participation of its mechanized corps. The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps, setting up a barrier against the village of Krinichka with the forces of the 5th Guards Mechanized Brigade and artillery, tried to reach the Krynka River with the rest of the brigades, but was stopped by artillery fire and counterattacks. The 33rd Guards Rifle Division of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps attacked Krinichka just as unsuccessfully. Equally unsuccessful was the offensive of the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps. By evening, he was able to occupy only Semenovskoye, irrevocably losing 28 T-34s and 11 T-70s. Another 31 T-34s and 16 T-70s were hit. 90 vehicles were out of order. The corps lost 442 killed and 1,040 wounded.

However, the forces and ammunition of the defenders were also running out. On July 23, Hollidt demanded urgent reinforcements and shells from Manstein. It was decided on

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to command him two SS Panzer divisions to organize a powerful counterattack.

By that time, the offensive impulse of the 2nd Guards Army had been exhausted. Both of its thoroughly battered mechanized corps had to be withdrawn to the second echelon. Only the 6th Guards Mechanized Brigade, the 36th Tank Brigade and the 1543rd Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment remained on the front line. On July 24, the Soviet troops on the bridgehead went on the defensive. ,

The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps of General K.V. Sviridov suffered heavy losses. 71 T-34s were lost forever, and 52 were damaged. Only 13 thirty-fours remained in service. 21 T-70s were also irretrievably lost, and 19 were damaged, so that only 28 tanks of this type remained in service. Of the 12 Su-152s, one self-propelled gun was lost forever, and 7 were damaged. But the only HF survived.

In the 6th Guards Mechanized Brigade, out of 3,286 personnel, they remained in the ranks in 2020. And by that time, the entire corps had lost 5,343 people out of [3,189, who were originally listed in it.

The condition of the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps of General T.I. Tanaschishin. Until July 24, he irretrievably lost 59 T-34s and 19 T-70s. Another 39 T-34s and 1 T-70 were under repair.

German tank troops also suffered losses. If the 23rd Panzer Division had 40 tanks in service, including 13 modernized T-4s with a long-barreled 75-mm gun, then on July 23 the number of combat-ready vehicles decreased to 21. However, 18 of them were now modernized T-4s, a significant some of which returned from repair. On the other hand, in the 16th motorized division from July 21 to 23, the number of combat-ready tanks increased from 4 to 12. In the period from July 17 to 29, the 16th motorized and 23rd tank divisions lost 464 people killed, 255 missing, as well as 2582 wounded, for a total of 3301 people. The entire German 6th Army during this period suffered a total loss of 15,486 people, including

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including 2,359 killed, 2,001 missing and 11,126 wounded.

On July 25, Tolbukhin ordered the 2nd Guards Army to resume the offensive the next day in order to occupy Krinichka and Alekseevka. The offensive of the 1st and 13th Guards Rifle Corps, reinforced by artillery and two regiments of heavy KV tanks, began on July 26 with a delay of two and a half hours against the planned date, only at 17.30. It amounted to only a slight progress forward. In the next two days, Soviet attacks also ended in vain. In these battles, a prisoner from the reconnaissance battalion of the 16th motorized division was captured, who said that his division should be replaced by two SS divisions. Other information was received about the transfer of the Reich and Totenkopf divisions to the Mius. Front intelligence suggested that the Leibstandarte should also be expected to be transferred against the Southern Front, not knowing that it was precisely on these days that it was being transferred to Italy. The place of the Leibstandarte in the II SS Panzer Corps was taken by the 3rd Panzer Division of the Wehrmacht, also withdrawn from the Citadel strike group. On July 26 and 27, she concentrated in the area of the village of Krasnaya Zvezda. "Totenkopf" took up positions in Ordzhonikidze, and "Reich" - in Makeevka. On July 29, Reich had 85 combat-ready tanks, including 6 Tigers, 34 modernized T-4s, and 6 captured T-34s. The Totenkopf had 89 tanks in service, including 9 Tigers and 58 modernized T-4s. The 3rd Panzer Division had only 37 vehicles ready for battle, of which 11 modernized T-4s were the strongest. Only 13 tanks remained in service in the 16th motorized division, including 4 modernized T-4s. The 23rd Panzer Division had 34 combat-ready tanks, including 20 modernized T-4s. The SS Panzer Corps probably had at least 100 assault guns at its disposal.

To participate in the counterattack, two air groups of the 77th squadron of dive bombers and one air group of the 1st assault squadron on the Focke Wulfach-190 were transferred to the zone of the 6th Army. In addition, with Taman there was a

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one air group of the 52nd Fighter Squadron was deployed on the Me-109.

By July 28, 284 tanks remained in service in Soviet tank units against 258 from the Germans. Another 214 Soviet tanks were under repair, and 276 were irretrievably lost in battle. And in terms of assault guns, the Germans had an obvious advantage.

By July 29, German troops announced the destruction or damage of 580 Soviet tanks. Strictly speaking, Soviet data do not contradict this figure. After all, there were probably some losses in tanks on July 28. On average, Soviet troops lost 44 tanks per day, and July 28 was still the last day of the Soviet offensive, although there were already few tanks involved in it. In addition, part of the Soviet tanks that failed in the first days of the fighting could already be repaired by July 28th. In the future, by the way, the Germans corrected these figures and by August 6 they announced the destruction or damage of 585 tanks, which probably corresponds to reality.

On July 30, the blow of the SS corps fell on the 31st rifle corps of the 5th shock army, in three divisions of which by this time a total of just over [2 thousand people remained in service, and on the right-flank formations of the 28th army mission, which by July 28 had lost 2688 killed, 279 missing and 9131 wounded, which, by the way, was almost equal to the losses of the entire German 6th Army during the operation. The 33rd Guards Tank Brigade of this army had 8 of its own tanks and two more captured German tanks in service.

Tolbukhin, despite the emerging threat of a German counterattack, on the morning of July 29 ordered the 2nd Guards Army to resume the offensive, transferring to it his last reserve - the 140th tank brigade with 63 combat-ready tanks. The front commander hoped that the troops of the 5th shock army would be able to repulse the counterattack. In addition to the 140th Tank Brigade, the 33rd and 3rd Guards Rifle Divisions were to take part in the offensive scheduled for July 30.

The latter at the same time with one rifle regiment was supposed to cover the junction with the 5th shock army. Just in time

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this 13th Guards Rifle Regiment was hit by the 23rd Panzer Division when, on the morning of July 30, having forestalled the 2nd Guards Army, the Germans themselves went on the offensive. It played into their hands that the Soviet troops, who were advancing all the time, did not have time to properly prepare for defense.

Parts of the 23rd Panzer Division passed through the forest north of Saur-Mogilsky. The 128th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of this division surrounded the 13th Guards Rifle Regiment in Saur-Mogilsky. At 11.45 Berlin time, the 23rd Panzer Division linked up on the approaches to Marinovka and Garany with the combat groups of the 16th Motorized Division advancing from the south, crushing the 88th Guards Rifle Regiment, which had been left to cover the main forces of the 33rd Guards Rifle Regiment. divisions advancing on the ill-fated Krinichka. As a result, five rifle regiments of two divisions were surrounded, and the 88th regiment, although it did not fall into the ring, suffered heavy losses.

At the same time, the 294th Infantry and 15th Air Field Divisions of the XXII Army Corps went on the offensive against the southern flank of the 2nd Guards Army with the support of assault guns. The 86th Guards Rifle Division had to leave Semenovskiy and Kalinovka. The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps occupied the trenches on the eastern bank of the Mius. To release the encircled commander of the 2nd Guards Army Ya.G. The cruiser decided with the help of the 24th Guards Rifle Division and the 36th Guards Tank Brigade. However, he did not have to put this plan into practice to the end.

At 23:00 on July 30, Kreizer was replaced as commander of the 2nd Guards Army by the former commander of the 51st Army, G.F. Zakharov.

The SS Panzer Corps had to advance against the 5th Shock Army, which had been on the defensive for more than a week and managed to prepare to repel the enemy. The army was reinforced by the 1st Guards Anti-Tank Brigade, which had 28 guns of 45 and 76 mm caliber and a hundred anti-tank rifles.

The Hausser Corps was supported by combat groups of the 306th and 336th Infantry and 3rd Mountain Jaeger Divisions, united

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nye in the battle group HUP of the army corps. They acted on the left flank of the 3rd Panzer Division, which was to advance on Hill 211.5 and the eastern outskirts of Gerasimovka. The Totenkopf aimed at Hill 213.9 with two regiments along the Snezhnoye-Marinovka road. Another regiment of the division was to advance on Gerasimovka.

The Reich division was to attack Stepanovka with two battle groups. The Panzer Grenadier Regiment "Deutschland" captured the northwestern outskirts of the village. The tank regiment "Reich", reinforced by a battalion of the regiment "Führer", took Hill 230.9, but then suffered heavy losses in the minefield. After the sappers had made passages in the minefield, the Reich tankers and motorized riflemen advanced to Marinovka. However, they did not have time to reach the Olkhovichok gully to connect with units of the XXX Army Corps, as they were subjected to a counterattack by the 24th Guards Rifle Division and the 37th Tank Brigade, who were trying to release the main forces of the 3rd and 33rd Guards Rifle Divisions. .

Units of the Totenkopf and the 3rd Panzer Division advancing on Gerasimovka also encountered Soviet minefields and heavy artillery fire. They never managed to take a height of 213.9 that day.

During the first day of the offensive, the SS Panzer Corps lost 915 men killed, wounded and missing. The Totenkopf division suffered the greatest losses, losing 494 soldiers and officers. Of the 211 tanks, 91 were hit. Of the 10 Tigers, the Totenkopf lost 8. The total losses of the armored vehicles of the division amounted to 48 tanks and 12 assault guns. Reich lost 25 tanks and 300 men. The 3rd Panzer Division lost 18 tanks and 121 soldiers.

The 31st Guards Rifle Corps, which fought against the SS Panzer Corps, reported losses of 328 killed and 918 wounded. And this is without taking into account the losses of the 13th Guards Rifle Regiment, which fought against the 23rd Panzer Division, and also without taking into account the missing. The commanders especially disliked reporting the last category of casualties to the top, because the authorities suspected a prisoner or, worse, a defector in every missing person. That's why

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commanders, not without reason, feared that they would not be patted on the head for the large number of missing people. Often such data generally preferred not to be reported to higher headquarters.

In general, on the first day, the casualties of the SS corps turned out to be at least 1.4 times greater than the losses of the Soviet troops opposing it. By the end of the day, the 31st Guards Rifle Corps had almost run out of ammunition.

Meanwhile, the XXX Army Corps launched a counterattack on the formations of the 28th Army, trying to capture the southern exit from the Olkhovchik valley in order to prevent the withdrawal of Soviet troops fighting against the SS Panzer Corps. The battle group of the 294th Infantry Division was able to enter the Olkhovchik Valley, and the 17th and 336th Infantry Divisions pushed back the 387th Infantry Division. The command of the 28th Army committed its last reserve, the 127th Rifle Division, to the battle. The 387th Rifle Division, which had fallen into disarray, was decided to withdraw to the eastern bank of the Mius. The losses of the 294th Infantry Division, which bore the brunt of the fighting, on that day reached 600 people, including 150 dead and missing.

All night on July 31, the Reich grenadiers continued to fight in Stepanovka. The XXI tank corps continued to make its way to Olkhovchik.

The command of the Southern Front feared that the enemy would break through to the eastern bank of the Mius. The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps was transferred to the 28th Army, and the 36th Tank Brigade was placed in the Olkhovchik gully. The mechanized brigades were to counterattack along the river to the south, towards Russky.

On the morning of July 31, the Gauss combat group from the XXIX Army Corps attacked the 347th Rifle Division in the Elizavetinsky area and took 1,200 prisoners. These losses, as well as a significant number of those killed, were not reflected in the evening summary of the losses of the 28th Army. On July 31, she allegedly lost only 81 killed and 166 wounded. Here again one can feel the reluctance to report to the top about a large number of missing persons.

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Meanwhile, "Totenkopf" continued to attack the height of 213.9. The attack was carried out in the predawn darkness, at 3.00 Moscow time, without artillery preparation. The artillery raid began only when the grenadiers had already broken into the first line of trenches. The second line of trenches and the Soviet rear came under fire. At this time, German sappers made passages in the minefields. At 9.15 Berlin time, another powerful 45-minute artillery preparation was carried out. Soviet positions were also attacked by Yu-87 dive bombers. However, Soviet resistance was not broken. Regiment "Eike" could not take Gerasimovka. In the afternoon, the battle stopped because of the sunny rain. By evening, Totenkopf had only 20 combat-ready tanks, including 1 Tiger and 5 command tanks, as well as 14 assault guns and 6 Marder self-propelled guns.

The offensive of the 3rd Panzer Division was not crowned with success, which by the end of the day had 9 tanks and 9 self-propelled guns "Marder" in service. The division lost 196 men. On the same day, the 3rd Panzer Division was transferred to the southern front of the Soviet bridgehead, the Artemovka area, and its artillery was is- , used to support the advance of two SS divisions.

On July 31, the 31st Guards Corps, according to a report, lost 719 killed and 1941 wounded. Again, the absence of missing people is striking. The corps had almost no shells left.

On July 31, the command of the 2nd Guards Army tried to rescue units of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps from the encirclement. The 13th Guards Regiment managed to break out of the encirclement in Saur-Mogilsky in the morning. But the 91st Guards Rifle Regiment failed to do this. The last report of his headquarters ended with the words: "The enemy with tanks and infantry went on the attack from all sides: Farewell." The same sad fate befell the other encircled regiments. The losses of the 23rd Panzer Division, which had eliminated the "cauldron", on that day amounted to 15 tanks. The Soviet deblocking strike ran into parts of the "Reich" and the 23rd Panzer Division and failed. Hot battles continued in Stepanov

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ke, where on July 31 the 24th Guards Rifle Division from the relief group broke into. By the end of the day, the Fuhrer Regiment alone had lost about 200 men. By the end of the day, the Reich division had 24 tanks left in service, including | "Tiger", as well as 5 command tanks and 20 assault guns. By this time, the 16th Motorized Division had 12 tanks, 22 assault guns and 22 anti-tank self-propelled guns.

The 23rd Tank Brigade had to fight against the 36th Guards Tank Brigade and the 1543rd Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment, which lost another Su-152 in this battle. Losses of the 36th Guards Tank Brigade of the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps amounted to 11 damaged T-34s, 20 killed and 19 wounded. And the 37th Guards Tank Brigade of the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps in the Stepanovka area lost 28 tanks, including 15 "thirty-fours", knocked out and burned. Only 4 T-34s and 7 T-70s remained in it.

Until July 31, the command of the Southern Front hid from the Headquarters how difficult the situation of the encircled regiments of two divisions of the 2nd Guards Army was. Perhaps Stalin received information about the true situation through other channels, most likely the Smersh line. There was another alternative channel of information - representatives of the General Staff in the fronts and armies. However, since the formidable directive was sent not only to Tolbukhin, but also to Vasilevsky, it can be assumed that the General Staff officers had nothing to do with it. Stalin wrote: "I consider it a shame for the command of the front that it allowed, through its negligence and indiscretion, the encirclement of our four rifle regiments by enemy troops. It would be time for the third year of the war to learn the correct driving of troops.

I demand that the front command immediately inform the General Staff in a special cipher about what emergency measures it thinks to take in order to rescue the encircled and unconditionally stop the advance of enemy troops. The front has the means for this, and it must fulfill this task."

Unfortunately, when at the headquarters of the Southern Front in the late evening of July 31 they received a Stalinist directive to rescue

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there was almost no one. Earlier, at 11:00 on July 31, Marshal S.K. Timoshenko, a representative of the Headquarters, arrived at the command post of the 2nd Guards Army and stayed there for eight hours. Perhaps, on the basis of his report to Stalin, an angry directive was born. It is characteristic that on the eve of Timoshenko was at the command post of the same army together with Vasilevsky. Perhaps their visit caused the replacement of the then commander Ya. G. Kreizer by G. F. Zakharov. But Stalin did not yet express alarm that day, probably counting on a change of command to ensure a successful

unblocking the surrounded. But when by the end of July 31 it became clear that the offensive of the deblocking group was failing, Iosif Vissarionovich became really angry.

G. F. Zakharov was forced on the evening of July 31 to give the order to the deblocking grouping to go on the defensive at the line of 223.7 and 202.0, where the 24th Guards Rifle Division withdrew from Stepanovka. The remnants of the encircled regiments were ordered to break through on their own. On this day, the 8th Air Army also suffered the greatest losses in the entire battle. Having made 424 sorties, she lost 33 aircraft. The enemy made more than 2,000 sorties that day.

The PN SS Panzer Corps irretrievably lost 24 tanks on 30-31 July. This was comparable to the irretrievable losses of the corps' tanks during Operation Citadel (30 tanks). Another 81 tanks, including 9 Tigers, were under repair. Only half of the tanks from among those that were in the corps at the beginning of the offensive remained in service.

On July 31, Manstein arrived at Hausser's command post. Soon the commander of the Führer Regiment, Obersturmbannführer Sylvester Stadler, appeared and reported that the advance of the two battalions of the regiment was delayed due to mud, but that they would arrive on the battlefield in five hours. Hausser and Stadler were able to convince Manstein that it makes sense to repeat | August attack key height 203.4.

The Soviet command already knew on July 30 that tank divisions of the SS corps were operating against the Mius bridgehead. The 31st Guards Corps was badly battered and almost

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had no ammunition. The 86th Guards Rifle Division was withdrawn to the second echelon of the 2nd Guards Army.

By 04:00 on August 1, the remnants of the encircled regiments came out to their own. Few survived. 150 men remained in the 88th Guards Rifle Regiment, 300 in the 84th, and 55 men in the 5th Guards Rifle Regiment, and the commander and staff of this regiment were killed or captured. From the 91st Guards Rifle Regiment, which was farthest from the Soviet positions, not no one came out.

After the defeat suffered by the 2nd Guards Army, Tolbukhin already doubted the possibility of holding the bridgehead, but for the time being he was going to defend it. At 1000, he ordered the 151st Rifle Division, which was in reserve, to take up positions on the east coast. The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps, replaced by it, on the contrary, was heading to the bridgehead, however, to the second echelon. He had to counter-attack in the event of an enemy breakthrough. The remnants of the 37th Guards Tank Brigade were withdrawn to the eastern bank of the Mius. Tolbukhin did not know that at 10.30 (12.30 Moscow time) | August Hausser received an order from the headquarters of Army Group South to withdraw the SS corps from the battle. Manstein hoped to use it to repel the expected Soviet offensive in the Kharkov region. But already at 04:00, two battalions of the Führer regiment began to move forward to attack height 203.4 under the cover of a smoke screen set by six-barreled reactive mortars (Soviet soldiers, by analogy with the famous "Katyushas", affectionately called the six-barreled mortars "vanyushas"). "- it turned out that the rocket artillery of the two warring parties forms, as it were, a couple in love). With the capture of this height, it was possible to suppress the Soviet artillery positions in the region of height 213.9. The attack was carried out without artillery preparation, counting on surprise. Stadler's fighters marched 3 km, crushing the resistance of Soviet units that did not expect an attack, and already at 8.45 (at 10.45 Moscow time) they occupied height 203.4. Just 45 minutes after Tolbukhin gave orders to his troops, the defense of the bridgehead appeared hopeless.

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Here the Germans had an overlay. At that moment, Stadler still had no connection with his own people. After the Soviet command realized that the height was captured by the enemy, it was followed by

artillery attack on the western slope of the height. At the German positions, it was decided that the Russians had pushed back Stadler's battalions to the western slope with a counterattack, and, in turn, opened powerful artillery fire on the ridge of the height. The Fuhrer's grenadiers hurriedly hid in the shelters dug by the Red Army, and Stadler and his staff hid under a wrecked Soviet tank.

In other sectors, Soviet artillery was suppressed by 11:00 am by a powerful artillery barrage of 600 guns and rocket launchers. By 5:30 p.m., the Deutschland Regiment had cleared Stepanovka of Soviet troops. Its defenses were weakened by the retreat of the right-flank units of the 24th Guards Rifle Division the day before. The SS men captured the positions of the Soviet artillery, which flanked the area in front of Hill 213.9.

The Totenkopf division on the morning of August 1 had 19 combat-ready tanks, including 3 Tigers, as well as 6 command tanks, 14 assault guns and 16 Marders. The attack on Hill 213.9 was launched at 13.30. An hour later, the main line of defense on the hill was broken through. By 17.00, height 213.9 was captured. The Soviet units defending the height were subjected to intensive shelling from the side of height 203.4. With its capture by Stadler's grenadiers, the entire Soviet defense on the bridgehead began to fall apart. The Totenkopf division was unsuccessfully counterattacked by one of the brigades of the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps.

The 16th motorized and 23rd tank divisions at that time were crowding the Soviet 24th, 49th and 87th guards rifle divisions, which, after the fall of height 203.4, could not hold their positions, since they had lost help in the form of flanking artillery fire and, conversely, found themselves under aimed fire from German artillery. Already at 14.30, the commander of the 2nd Guards Army ordered the 24th Guards Rifle Division to retreat to the Olkhovchik gully, and at 15.00 he began to withdraw the 13th Guards Rifle Corps from the hut. 49th Guards Rifle Division

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was to retreat to the eastern bank of the Olkhovchik River, the 86th Guards Rifle Division was withdrawn to the reserve, and the 87th took up defensive positions on the eastern bank of the Mius. Brigades of the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps were also transferred to Balka Ol'khovchik. The 31st Guards Rifle Corps, according to a report from its headquarters, allegedly lost only 209 killed and 475 wounded that day, contriving this time not to show missing in the losses. Meanwhile, by the nature of the fighting on that day, when the Soviet troops were forced to retreat from their positions under the continuous pressure of the enemy, there should have been especially many missing people.

Meanwhile, from the south, the combat group XXIX of the army corps, supported by 12 assault guns, delivered a butt blow [of the 3rd Guards Rifle Corps and the right-flank formations of the 28th Army. The German infantry occupied Yeli-Zavetinsky, as well as height 168.5. In the documents of the headquarters of the 28th army, even at 20.00, this height was listed as being held by the forces of the 127th and 347th rifle divisions. Probably, the army headquarters still expected to return this important height and did not want to upset the front command. The 347th division on that day lost 190 killed and 858 wounded, and the 127th - 21 killed and 59 wounded. As always, there were no missing people. But the approval of the formations of the 28th Army, [August they destroyed 8 enemy tanks and 2 Ferdinand assault guns, of which there were not a single thing in the 6th Army at that moment.

| August 8th Air Army was able to send only 192 aircraft into battle, which made 342 sorties, losing 18 aircraft. The next day, only 176 aircraft were combat-ready.

By the evening of [August] Tolbukhin obtained permission from Stalin to evacuate the bridgehead. At 0200, units of the 31st Guards Rifle Corps began to retreat to the eastern bank of the Mius under the cover of rear guards. With the onset of darkness, the bridgehead and divisions of the 28th Army began to leave. By the morning of August 2, all divisions of the 2nd Guards Army had withdrawn there. Only the [3rd and 14th Guards Mechanized Brigades

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4th mechanized corps, which continued the rearguard battles. By the end of the day, they also crossed to the eastern shore. At 17.20, the Totenkopf division occupied the old German trenches on the west bank of the Mius. The battle was over.

On August 3, the SS Panzer Corps began to transfer to the areas of Debaltsevo and Kramatorsk for further operations in the Kharkov region. On August 4 and 5, the troops of the Southern Front tried to recapture the bridgehead, but not too actively, and had no success. Soviet tanks were cut off from infantry and destroyed by German artillery. These attacks resulted in heavy tank losses. The number of combat-ready tanks in the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps fell from 98 to 43 from 3 to 6 August.

In the divisions of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps, after the retreat from the bridgehead, there were 8579 people. They managed to save most of their artillery.

Between 17 and 27 July, the 2nd Guards Army and its attached 4th Guards Mechanized Corps lost, according to a report from its headquarters, 23,770 killed, wounded and missing. The absence of data on losses in the following days, from July 28 to August 2, leads to unhappy reflections, when they were clearly the largest during the German counteroffensive. The 31st Guards Corps of the 5th Shock Army lost, according to a report from its headquarters, between July 17 and August 8, 2,446 killed and 10,347 wounded and sick. Almost all of these losses occurred before August 2, as active hostilities on the Southern Front ceased later. But even in this case, a clear underestimation of losses is indicated by the absence of a category of missing persons. C | By August 10, the troops of the Southern Front had lost 6,249 killed, 4,258 missing and 18,846 wounded. The vast majority of these losses accounted for 11 and August 2, when there were battles on the bridgehead. The command of the German 6th Army estimated the number of destroyed and knocked out Soviet tanks at 285.

The losses of the Soviet troops during the Mius offensive operation from July 17 to August 2, 1943, according to official data from the headquarters of the Southern Front, amounted to

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conducted in the book "Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century. Losses of the Armed Forces" (this is an expanded edition of the book "Secrecy Removed"), 15,303 killed and missing and 45,767 wounded. The numbers of irretrievable losses are undoubtedly underestimated by at least half, since, according to Tippelskirch, the Germans took only about 18 thousand prisoners on the Miussky bridgehead (some German publications give a more accurate figure - 17,762).

The irretrievable losses certainly do not show the majority of the missing. It is unlikely that the losses of the encircled regiments of the 2nd Guards Army were taken into account here, of which only 505 people were saved. It is no coincidence that the authors of the book "Secrecy Removed" do not share in the irretrievable losses of those killed and missing" - so that readers, having seen a small number of missing people, do not doubt the reliability of the official figures given. If we assume that among the missing, captured and killed, there were actually equal numbers, then their true number can be estimated at 36,000 people. The total number of those killed, taken into account in the known to us and (far from completely) reports of individual Soviet units and formations in the period up to July 31, with the addition of two-thirds of those killed on the Southern Front in the period 1 August 109, is at least 15,628, which, by the way, exceeds the official number of irretrievable losses (15,303). Then the true irretrievable losses should be about 51,628 killed and missing, and the total losses should be about 97,395.

The German 6th Army lost 21,369 men between 17 July and 2 August, including 3,289 killed, 2,254 missing and 15,817 wounded. The irretrievable losses were 2.8 times less than the official Soviet losses, and the total losses were 2.9 times less. However, if we take true Soviet losses, then the ratio becomes much less favorable for the Soviet side: in terms of total losses - 4.6:1, in irretrievable losses - 9.3:1.

The Totenkopf division lost 1,458 men on the Mius, including 219 killed, 46 missing, and 1,193 wounded. These losses were twice as low as her losses during

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operation "Citadel", which, according to L. N. Lopukhovskiy, amounted to 3051 people. The losses of the "Reich" and the 3rd Panzer Division cannot yet be accurately calculated, as well as the true losses of the Soviet formations that opposed them. It is only clear that the losses of the other two divisions of the SS corps were significantly less than the losses of the "Totenkopf". It is possible that the total losses of the 3rd Panzer Division and Reich are approximately equal to the losses of one Totenkopf division. The defeat of the Soviet troops during the Mius battle on July 17 - August 2, 1943 was due primarily to the mistakes of the command of the Southern Front. The mistake was to deliver two main blows, and even an auxiliary distracting blow. This only dispersed the forces of Soviet artillery and aviation. It would be more expedient to strike one main blow, but with larger forces and on a wider front. The mistake was, as the former chief of staff of the Southern Front S.S. Biryuzov honestly admitted in his memoirs, the belated and poorly organized entry into the battle of the formations of the 2nd Guards Army. The 2nd Guards Army attempted an offensive on July 30, on the initiative of Golubukhin, when the threat of a powerful enemy counterattack with the participation of SS divisions had already become apparent. This attempt ultimately led to the senseless loss of four rifle regiments. A negative role was also played by the fact that after the start of the German counterattack on July 30, the headquarters of the Southern Front began to hesitate as to whether it would be possible to hold the bridgehead, but did not come to a definite decision until the morning of August 1 the fall of the bridgehead was not inevitable. The command simultaneously tried to hold the bridgehead and prepare the conditions for its possible evacuation, and this only led to unnecessary losses. If it were deemed necessary to leave the bridgehead, then the optimal time for evacuation would be the night of | August. Then it would be possible to avoid heavy losses, especially prisoners, in battles | and 2 August. By the end of July 31, the encircled regiments were already almost completely destroyed, and the task of releasing them was lost.

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la relevance. But neither the front headquarters nor the Headquarters knew about this yet. And the order to release the encircled at any cost, received on the evening of July 31, weighed heavily on Tolbukhin. It was pointless to start talking about the evacuation of the bridgehead in such a situation. At his own peril and risk, the front commander, who was also controlled by two marshals, Vasilevsky and Timoshenko, could not give the order to evacuate, fearing the wrath of Stalin.

At the same time, even on July 31, there were real chances to hold the Miusky bridgehead. After all, there was very little left to hold out, two or three days, before the start of the Soviet offensive on Kharkov. The fact that it would begin on August 3 was known, if not by Tolbukhin, then by Vasilevsky and Timoshenko. And after that, the SS Panzer Corps would certainly have been transferred to Kharkov. By the way, the SS divisions were seriously weakened in the battles on the Mius and were able to begin to actively operate near Kharkov only after August 10th. And without the three tank divisions that were part of | SS Panzer Corps, the German 6th Army would hardly have been able to liquidate the bridgehead, having only two weakened mobile formations, the 23rd Panzer and 16th Motorized Divisions. To hold the bridgehead, it was only necessary to concentrate all forces on holding key heights and settlements, without stopping even before using the last reserves. Unfortunately, the headquarters of the Southern Front did not do this.

After the completion of the fighting on the Mius, the SS Panzer Corps was transferred to Kharkov. It should be said that during the counter-offensive in the Belgorod-Kharkov direction, which began on August 3, our troops had an overwhelming superiority over the enemy. After regroupings and resupplying, the Voronezh and Steppe fronts included 980.5 thousand people, more than 12 thousand guns and mortars, 2,400 tanks and self-propelled artillery mounts, and 1,300 aircraft. Soviet troops had superiority over the enemy in people by more than 3 times, artillery and tanks - 4 times and aviation - 1.3 times. Here it is more necessary to make a reservation that the superiority in manpower in combat units was still

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more impressive and even increased if we take into account the march reinforcements, which were much more significant from the Soviet side than from the German side.

After the end of the battle on the Mius, the headquarters of the II SS Panzer Corps was transferred to Italy, and the two remaining SS divisions as part of the Shtank Corps were transferred near Kharkov. Here they participated in counterattacks near Bogodukhov. Manstein recalled: "On August 3, the enemy offensive began, first on the front of the 4th Panzer Army and on the sector of the Kempf group west of Belgorod. The enemy managed to make a breakthrough at the junction of both armies and significantly expand it in depth and width in the following days. The 4th Panzer Army was pushed back to the west, the Kempf group to the south, towards Kharkov. Already on August 8, the gap between the two armies reached 55 km in the area northwest of Kharkov. The path to Poltava and further to the Dnieper was apparently open to the enemy.

The command of the group decided to pull up to Kharkov 3 tk (SS tank divisions, which Hitler now completely left to the group, and 3 td). It was to be used by Kempf's group to attack the eastern flank of the enemy's breakthrough wedge. At the same time, the 4th Panzer Army was to strike at the western flank with the forces of two tank divisions returned by the Center group and one MOTODIVVIIZIA.

But it was clear that these forces, and the forces of the group in general, could no longer hold the front line. The losses of our divisions have reached very alarming proportions. Due to prolonged overvoltage, 2 divisions were unable to continue the battle. Due to the rapid advance of the enemy, we also lost a large number of tanks that were in repair shops behind the front line. =

The enemy was able, apparently faster than we expected, to make up for his losses suffered by him during Operation Citadel. But first of all, he brought up new large forces from other fronts.

On August 7, the tankers of the 1st Panzer Army Katukov stir

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with a powerful blow, they captured the important railway junction of Bogodukhov, where large supplies of fuel fell into their hands. With the loss of Bogodukhov, the Belgorod-Kharkov group of Germans was cut in two. The paths from Kharkov to the northwest were cut. The main communication from Kharkov to Poltava was also under threat. In August, for this purpose, the transfer of three tank divisions from the Donbass to the Kharkov region began. On August 6, the 3rd Panzer Division arrived in the Zolochiv area and started fighting with formations of the 5th Guards Tank Army. The next day, the Reich division began to concentrate near Olshany. Its advanced units resisted the 3rd mechanized corps at the Vel. Rogozyanka, Skovorodinovka, Krysino. In addition, the divisions "Viking" and "Dead head".

Already on August 8, Katukov's tankers, who at that moment had 260 tanks, had to face the 3rd Panzer Division and the Reich division, as well as the remnants of the 19th Panzer Division, which stopped the advance of the 1st Panzer Army. missions. At dawn on August 8, the Reich SS Panzer Division from the Olshan area attacked Bogodukhov, forcing them to go on the defensive at the Krysino, Maksimovka, Vel. Rogozyanka 3rd mechanized and 3] 1st tank corps. Soviet intelligence reports stated that the SS division "Dead Head" had been transferred to the Kharkiv region, and the SS Viking division, which had previously occupied the rear defensive line at the Kharkov bridgehead in the Barvenkovo region, Kramatorsk, was brought into battle.

Fierce fighting on the Merchik River continued all day on 10 August. The German command reinforced its grouping in this direction with the Totenkopf division. In the afternoon, Soviet troops captured the crossings across the river. Merchik and captured small bridgeheads in the areas of the villages of 10th and 11th Hundred, Sharovka, Aleksandrovka. Having completed the crossing of the main forces to the southern bank of the Merchik River at night, the Soviet 1st Panzer Army on the morning of August 11

resumed the attack. The enemy tried to stop him by taking part of the forces of Chervony Prapor, Maryino, which had already been broken through by Katukov's tankers by 6.00.

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At 0900 on August 11, formations of the 1st Panzer Army broke into Alekseevka, Vysokopole, at the station. The Kovyagi, having cut the Kharkov-Poltava railroad, were immediately subjected to a counterattack by enemy tanks and infantry from the Valki and Kolomak area. The counterattack was repulsed.

In the afternoon [August 1], in the area south of Bogodukhov, the Germans launched counterattacks against the Soviet 1st Panzer Army. At 18:00, the Germans counterattacked with one regiment of motorized infantry of the Totenkopf division with 30 tanks in the northeast direction - Konstantinovka, Murafa and one regiment of motorized infantry "Reich" with 50 tanks in the northwest direction - Stary Merchik, Sharovka. By the end of the day, the enemy broke through behind the rear of the 1st Panzer Army, which had reached the railroad in the Vysokopole area. Soviet tankers were surrounded.

However, thanks to the counterattack of the reserves of the Voronezh Front, by the end of August 12, the SS men were forced to leave Sharovka. The 3rd division of the Panzer Corps, which included Totenkopf, Reich, and the 3rd Panzer Division of the Wehrmacht, was unable to clear the Poltava-Kharkov road, which was one of the goals of the counterattack. |

During the reflection of the German counterattacks, dramatic moments arose more than once. Having occupied Kovyagi and Vysokopole, the main forces of the Totenkopf, Viking and Reich were going to break through to Bogodukhov from the east and southwest. On the morning of August 12, the 1st Panzer Army also resumed the offensive, but to no avail. Only two motorized rifle battalions of the 6th motorized rifle brigade managed to infiltrate at night through the combat formations of the "Totenkopf" and again take possession of Vysokopole. They were surrounded for four days, until on the night of August 16, 160 surviving soldiers broke through to their own.

Having brought up the SS Panzer Division "Viking" and two infantry divisions of the Wehrmacht, the command of Army Group "South" on August 13 launched a new counterattack to break through to Bogodukhov. However, the forces of the 1st tank army of Katukov, which then numbered 134 combat-ready tanks and was transferred to

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the help of Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army with 155 tanks (according to other sources - from 115), as well as the 6th Guards Army of I. M. Chistyakov repulsed all attacks.

The "Reich" and "Totenkopf" divisions resumed their offensive and, advancing 4-6 km, captured Khrushcheva Nikitovka. The main blow fell on the 3rd mechanized and 31st tank corps, which the SS pushed back 3-4 km. [On August 3, they broke through end-to-end between the 1st and 5th Guards Tank Armies and began to threaten the 5th Guards Army. Almost all of the anti-tank artillery of these armies was destroyed. To cover Bogodukhov from the south, the 22nd Guards Rifle Corps of the 6th Guards Army was hastily transferred, which took up positions in the defense zones of the 6th Tank and 3rd Mechanized Corps, as well as parts of front-line artillery.

When attempts to break through to Bogodukhov from the east and southeast failed, a counterattack was launched from the south. To this end, the German command concentrated the main Totenkopf forces in the area southeast of B. Rublyovka to attack Kolontaev from the south. Parts of the "Reich" were transferred to the Kolomak area. On August 14, the 6th Guards Army penetrated 10-12 km into the German defenses and created a threat of encirclement of the Kharkov group from the west. On August 15, the SS Soviets broke through the front of the 6th Tank Corps and went to the rear of the 6th Guards Army, which was forced to retreat to the line of Konstantinov, Alekseev. The guards retreated across the Merlai Merchik River, but the next day the German advance was halted.

To break through to Bogodukhov from the west in the Akhtyrka area, on August 18, the 7th, 11th and 19th Panzer divisions, the Grossdeutschland division and two battalions of "tigers" attacked. The SS divisions did not play an active role in this counterattack, so we will not dwell on this battle in detail. We only note that on August 19 the Totenkopf division, advancing south of Akhtyrka, took Kotelva, which the 4th Guards Army recaptured on August 26. This was the end of the participation of the SS divisions in the Battle of Kursk. They were assigned to the defense of the Dnieper.

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As a result of counterattacks near Bogodukhov and Akhtyrka, the Germans failed to prevent the fall of Kharkov, which the troops of the Steppe Front of I.S. Konev took on August 22. However, these counterattacks undoubtedly prevented the encirclement of the Kharkov grouping and ensured the retreat to the west of the German 4th Panzer Army and the Kempf Task Force, which was renamed the German 8th Army shortly after the fall of Kharkov.

Manstein summed up the results of the battle for Kharkov in the following way: "As a result of the active use ... of tank formations taken from the Donbass and from the front of the Center group, we were still able to stop the enemy breakthrough at Poltava on August 23, at least temporarily. The front was again restored, although still weak and with many gaps, in the zone of the 8th and 4th tank armies from a point immediately south of Kharkov to the area southwest of Akhtyrka. Despite the fact that they maintained contact between the 4th Panzer Division and the left flank of the Center group (2nd Army), there was still a wide gap on the front of the 4th Panzer Army southwest of Akhtyrka. It was eliminated at the end of the month as a result of our offensive and the simultaneous alignment of the front line.

In turn, the OKH described the results of the counterattack near Akhtyrka as follows by writing in his diary on August 24, 1943: "In the area south of Akhtyrka, the remnants of the encircled enemy grouping were destroyed. At the same time, 299 tanks and 188 guns were captured, as well as 1,800 prisoners. In terms of the number of prisoners, the result was ten times more modest than during the attack on the Mius. And the significance of this success was minimal. The offensive of the SS divisions, together with the tank divisions of the Wehrmacht, prevented the encirclement of the Kharkov group of Germans. But Kharkov, with its rich industrial base and tank factory, had to be abandoned, and with it a large number of tanks and assault guns that were being repaired. The German divisions had to retreat to the Dnieper. There are no data on the losses of the SS divisions, as well as the opposing troops, during counterattacks in the Bogodukhov area.

BREAKTHROUGH AT BUCCH. RESCUE OF THE GERMAN 1ST TANK ARMY IN THE SPRING OF 1944

At the end of March 1944, in the area of Kamianets-Podolsky, the German 1st Panzer Army, which included the SS Panzer Divisions Leibstandarte and Reich, was surrounded. The SS Panzer Corps, which included the 9th SS Panzer Division Hohenstaufen and the 10th SS Panzer Division Frundsberg, were used to free it from the "cauldron". As Marshal K. S. Moskalenko, who then commanded the 38th Army, recalled, "By March 28, the enemy tank army was surrounded almost from all sides in the area northeast of Kamenetz-Podolsky. The ring, whose circumference reached 150 km, was not firmly closed only in the west, between the left flank of the 4th Panzer Army at Lyantskoruni and the right flank of the 1st Guards Army of the settlement of Chemerovtsy. The gap was up to [15 km".

Destroy the grouping, numbering up to 200 thousand people in 23 divisions, including 10 tank and | motorized, it was a very tempting business. If successful, Hitler would have lost half of the tank forces on the Eastern Front. The formation of the outer front to encircle the operation was carried out by the 1st Panzer Army, reinforced by a rifle corps and the 351st rifle division. The bad thing was that the tank armies of the 1st Ukrainian Front could not interact directly with each other, since they were at a considerable distance from each other.

from friend. Despite the dominance of Soviet aviation in the air, it was not possible to create a reliable air blockade of the encircled. It was also affected by the fact that the Soviet tank armies suffered significant losses during the offensive and very few tanks remained in service.

K.S. Moskalenko complained: "The front had three tank armies, and there were not enough tanks to carry out the main, decisive task. Unfortunately, this is exactly what happened. The tank armies were small, scattered and used separately, as were the right-flank corps of the 1st Guards Army, cut off from it.

The freshest and most powerful 1st Panzer Army, although successfully operating far beyond the Dniester, in the region of Chernovtsy and Stanislav, could practically not help in defeating the encircled enemy grouping.

As for the 3rd Guards Tank Army, since March 29, its main forces were withdrawn to the front reserve for resupplying in order to prepare for subsequent actions - capturing the city of Lvov and reaching the state border at the final stage of the operation. This was done in accordance with the plan set out in the report of the Military Council of the front to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief I. V. Stalin on March 25 and elaborated at that time by the front headquarters headed by Lieutenant General A. N. Bogolyubov. Only its 9th mechanized corps under General K.A. Malygin, transferred to reinforce the 1st Guards Army, participated in the defeat of the encircled enemy grouping."

The German 1st Panzer Army concentrated all its forces north of Kamenetz-Podolsky and made a breakthrough to the north-west, which was unexpected for the command of the 1st Ukrainian Front. Zhukov thought that the enemy would try to break through in a southwestern direction, across the Dniester, and concentrated his most combat-ready formations in this direction. A breakthrough to the southwest, into the foothills of the Carpathians, seemed the most logical, since, given the grouping that had developed at that moment

of the German 1st Panzer Army would be carried out along the shortest path to their own. And General Hube was originally going to break through exactly to the crossings across the Dniester, but Field Marshal Manstein, commander of Army Group South, insisted on a breakthrough in the north-western direction, where, in order to release the 1st Panzer Army, a strike force in part of the SS tank corps, which then included 2 tank and 2 infantry divisions. Intelligence of the 1st Ukrainian Front was unable to uncover the creation of a deblocking group in a timely manner. Subsequently, she claimed that, in addition to the P SS Panzer Corps, consisting of the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions and the 349th Infantry Division, which arrived from France, and the 100th Light Infantry Division from Yugoslavia, to the outer front encirclement, the 367th Infantry Division from Yugoslavia, the 361st Infantry Division from Denmark and the 214th Infantry Division from Germany were deployed. Hausser, by the way, does not mention in his memoirs that the 367th division was part of his corps. An entry in the combat log of the 1st Ukrainian Front dated March 26 read: "Radio reconnaissance for the first time noted the operation of a radio network of an unknown numbering in the Zolochiv region." The next day it was written: "The enemy at the line of Zolochiv, Zborov, Konyukhi concentrated up to two tank divisions, which he pulled up from the west... chev) and Grooms. Record dated March 28: "On the Zborov section - zap. The enemy moved infantry and tanks in Podgaytse... In the Zolochiv area, up to an infantry regiment was noted, and up to 100 vehicles advanced from Zolochiv through Berezhany to Podgaytsy. However, the front command did not attach due importance to this message.

Manstein recalled how difficult it was to convince Hitler of the need for an urgent withdrawal of the 1st Panzer Army to the west and the creation of a deblocking group: "Flying out of Lvov in the early morning of March 25, I arrived at the Berghof for an afternoon report on the situation.

I described to Hitler the position of the 1st Panzer

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mission, pointing out that the enemy is exerting strong pressure on the eastern and northern sectors of its front, which for a long time the divisions that have lost their forces are not able to withstand, taking into account the insufficient supply provided by air. Deep on the western flank of the army, the enemy is located on its communications, advanced with the forward units of one tank army already to the southern bank of the Dniester, the other tank army - to the southeast, to Kamenetz-Podolsky, aiming at the rear of the 1st tank army. The enemy is also advancing south of the Dniester in order to block the army's path across the river.

In such a situation, I noted, there was nothing left but to break through the tank formations of the army to the west, restore their rear communications and communications with the 4th Panzer Army. Thus, perhaps, it would be possible to immediately cut off the rear of both enemy armies operating in the rear of the 1st Panzer Army. The army would have to cover its movement to the west with part of its forces from the east and northeast. Where the cover should be organized is a secondary issue. Be that as it may, the army can by no means immobilely maintain the positions of its currently overextended Eastern and Northeastern fronts. Rules, with its southern flank, it should still adjoin the Dniester. I reported that in no case could I agree with General Hube's plan to withdraw the army to the southern bank of the Dniester, first of all, given the operational need to concentrate the 1st and 4th tank armies north of the Carpathians, but also because the retreat of the army on the southern bank of the Dniester would lead it there, in all likelihood, to a new encirclement and then destruction.

In conclusion, I added that the condition for the success of the army's breakthrough to the west, which I proposed, was a counterattack from the 4th Panzer Army. For this purpose, the 4th Army must be immediately provided with reinforcements.

To this, Hitler stated that he did not have the opportunity to allocate forces for this. While he has to reckon with the possibility of an invasion in the west, he cannot shoot

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no connection from there. He also called the stay of our divisions in Hungary absolutely necessary - for political reasons.

After a heated argument with Hitler, Manstein asked the Führer's personal adjutant, General Schmundt, to convey his request to leave if his proposals for a breakthrough of the 1st Panzer Army to the west were not accepted.

Further, according to Manstein, the events developed as follows: "After dinner, my chief of staff, General Busse, called me at the apartment. Colonel-General Hube persistently suggested not to break through to the west, but to retreat south across the Dniester. In the evening, a radio message came from the army, which again indicated that a breakthrough to the west was not feasible, and a breakthrough to the south was a necessity. General Busse already answered the first proposal in the negative, but asked for my final decision. My decision remained the same: the army must break through to the west.

When I came to the evening report on the situation, Hitler's mood changed radically. He began with the following words: "I thought it over again, I agree with your plan for the breakthrough of the 1st Panzer Army to the west. I also reluctantly decided to include in the strike group of the 4th Panzer Army proposed by you the newly formed SS Panzer Corps in the west, consisting of the 9th and 10th SS TDs, as well as the 100th Guards Rifle Division from Hungary and 367- yu pd".

I lied that during this time I rejected General Hube's new proposal to break through to the south and insisted on breaking through the army to the west. In my opinion, I continued, the breakthrough to the west will be crowned

success, since both enemy tank armies, apparently, will disperse their forces in the direction of the crossings across the Dnieper. Then the head of the Operations Department, Lieutenant Colonel Schulz-Buttger, who accompanied me, read out my order to the 1st Panzer Army for a breakthrough to the west.

However, this was followed on March 30 by the resignation of Manstein and Kleist, commander-in-chief of Army Group A, from their posts. Manstein was replaced by Walter Model. According to Manstein's diary entry, he said at parting to Hitler that he could "transfer command to Model without su

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significant damage to the cause, since ... decisive measures have already been taken to save the 1st Panzer Army: firstly, his (Hitler's) decision to transfer the SS Panzer Corps from the west, and secondly, my order for the army to break through to the west north of the Dniester. Thus, what the command of the army group should be doing in the main at the present time has been done. In the future, it will only be important that the command organizes assistance and moral support to the troops. The model can handle this as well."

On March 30, the 4th Panzer Army had only 67 tanks and self-propelled artillery mounts in combat formations, and the rifle corps attached to it, which consisted of only two divisions, experienced an acute shortage of fuel and ammunition. Divisions of the German 1st Panzer Army were able to break through the front of the 4th Panzer Army in the area of Kadiivtsy, Orinin and withdraw in the direction of Borshchev, Buchach. The 3rd Guards Tank Army had 146 tanks and self-propelled guns. If she had been transferred to the area of the gap on the western sector of the inner front of the encirclement, then the German breakthrough, in all likelihood, could have been prevented. However, the headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front, led by Marshal Zhukov, and the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command continued to be convinced that the 1st Panzer Army of General Hans Valentin Hube would break through to the south, to the Dniester, as Hube had originally planned. The Soviet command sought to compress the "cauldron" as soon as possible and liquidate the encircled. At the same time, it clearly underestimated the possibility of an enemy breakthrough to the west. Therefore, the most powerful 3rd Guards Tank Army was used not to strengthen the western front of the encirclement with possible opposition from the enemy relief grouping, but, together with the 1st Guards Army, squeezed the inner front of the encirclement from the north.

As K. S. Moskalenko recalled, "the commander of the German 1st Panzer Army, Colonel General Hube, at first really sought to withdraw his troops beyond the Dniester and, for this, first of all, pulled them to the Kamenetz-Po-

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Dolsky, leaving a strong cover in the north, at the turn of Gorodok, Yarmolinty. On March 28, the advanced units of the retreating enemy grouping came close to the Kamenets-Podolsky region and started fighting there.

The reports of our 4th Panzer Army became more and more alarming. The enemy fiercely counterattacked her troops in a fairly significant area from Lyantskoruni to Kitay-Gorod. The first of these settlements is located to the northwest, and the second - to the southeast of Kamenetz-Pololsky. Thus, it seemed that the enemy was stubbornly striving for the Dniester. To this it must be added that the city of Khotin, where the Nazis were rushing, had a pontoon crossing, which could provide them with a retreat across the river. Further, radio reconnaissance spotted enemy radio stations beyond the Dniester belonging to the 1st Tank Army, the 3rd Tank Corps and two enemy tank divisions. All this could only be regarded as the direction of the enemy's retreat to the south beyond the Dniester.

This path seemed the most likely. Therefore, the main efforts of our troops were aimed at capturing and holding the crossings across the Dniester. Even the persistent attacks of the encircled in the western direction were regarded as the enemy's desire to break through to the crossings in the settlement Zalischiki.

Two important factors were not taken into account. The first of them was that the nearest escape routes across the Dniester had already been intercepted by the troops of our 38, I and 4th tank armies. The second circumstance that escaped the attention of front-line reconnaissance was the creation by the enemy to the west of our outer front of a strike grouping as part of the 4th Panzer Army for an offensive against its 1st Panzer Army in the direction of Podgaitsy, Buchach.

Thus, the German I th Panzer Army, which had 23 divisions, including 10 tank and motorized divisions, broke out of the encirclement. The Soviet troops failed to destroy it.

By April 2, at the cost of heavy losses, the Nazis managed to advance to the Borshchev area (between Kamenetz-Podolsky and Buchach). Here the enemy suddenly encountered

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to our 1672nd and 222nd anti-tank artillery regiments, which were heading to the Kamenetz-Podolsk region to help the troops of the 4th Tank Army.

The gunners quickly orientated themselves, deployed their guns and met the Nazis with heavy fire. In this extremely furious, bloody battle, 22 enemy tanks, [7 self-propelled artillery installations, up to 300 vehicles and more than 1000 Nazi soldiers and officers were destroyed. True, our gunners also suffered heavy losses."

On April 2, the 1st Panzer Army was presented with an ultimatum signed by Marshal Zhukov:

"To the commanders of the 3rd, 24th and 48th tank corps, 96th, 208th, 254th, 291st, 371st infantry divisions, 101st mountain rifle divisions, Schaal divisional group, 20th motorized divisions, 1st, 6th, 11th, 16th, 19th, 25th tank divisions, SS tank division "Reich" of the German army (for some reason, the division "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" was not mentioned in the ultimatum. It is possible that front-line intelligence did not establish its presence in the encircled grouping. — B.S.)

Ultimatum

You and the rest of the parts are in a complete environment. The front line has moved far away from you south and west...

In order to avoid senseless bloodshed, I offer you the following terms of surrender:

1. Surrounded German troops, led by their commanders and staffs, immediately cease hostilities.
2. You hand over to us all personnel, weapons and military equipment intact.

By accepting these terms of surrender and ceasing resistance, all generals, officers and soldiers are guaranteed life and safety. All personnel of the surrendered units are kept: military uniform, insignia, orders and personal property.

All the wounded and sick will receive immediate medical assistance. All personnel will be provided with normal food. The officers retain edged weapons and personal vehicles.

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Your reply is expected by [04.4.1944 Moscow time].

time in writing, through your parliaments, "ditch ...

However, the 1st Panzer Army had no intention of surrendering. The ultimatum listed only 14 divisions and | divisional group, while in reality there were up to 23 German divisions in the "cauldron".

On April 4, the German deblocking group went on the offensive with five divisions on a front of 35 km and easily crushed two Soviet rifle divisions. In two days, he advanced to a depth of more than 40 km. The 1st Panzer Army struck back. On April 7, the encircled united with the deblocking group in the area of the city of Buchach.

The commander of the IP of the SS Panzer Corps Hausser recalled: "The SS Panzer Corps was given the task of freeing the | th Hube Panzer Army, surrounded in the Kamenetz-Podolsky region, and reorganizing the defense with the help of Wehrmacht units subordinate to the corps. The weather was unfavorable: early spring slush in impassable terrain, with few roads, which soon became completely muddy. The first attempt to maneuver across Galich on the Dniester failed due to the fact that all the bridges were destroyed. Therefore, it was ordered to move further north, namely: the 100th Jaeger Division - through Podzhgaytsy to Buchach, and the Hohenstaufen, which had come under the command of the HG\USh of the tank corps of General Hermann Balck, was supposed to release Gernopol. The latter, unfortunately, failed, while Buchach, despite the complexity of the terrain, managed to get through to Hube's tank army, so that Model, Hube and Hausser in Buchach were able to shake hands. Seeing the remnants of an army emerging from encirclement after fighting during the Russian winter is an extremely difficult sight for any soldier. A lot of preparatory work was required from the corps doctors and quartermasters to provide care for the wounded and sick.

As a result of several battles, in which the remnants of the 16th and 19th army divisions, rescued from the encirclement, took part, the further advance of Kras

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Noah Army, its units west of Strypa were destroyed and a new line of defense was organized on this river. After completing this task, the corps, together with both of its SS Panzer divisions and the 8th Wehrmacht division, became part of the 4th Panzer Army of General Erhard Raus (later General Josef Harpe). The corps was assigned to the reserve of the Army Group "Northern Ukraine" and stationed near Zlotslov, east of Lemberg (Lvov). Preliminary preparations were made for the counterattack.

Events in the West prevented the implementation of the plans of the command: on June 6, the landing of the Anglo-American troops in Normandy began. The corps, consisting of two SS divisions, began to be transferred to France only on June 12. The battles on the Eastern Front became a good baptism of fire for two SS Panzer divisions, a good preparation for further operations."

If two panzer divisions had remained in the Eastern

front at the time of the beginning of the operation "Bagration", they would certainly have been used for a counterattack not in the southern, but in the central sector of the front. In this case, the SS corps, most likely, would have been able to significantly slow down the advance of the Belorussian fronts, and, perhaps, the Bagration operation would not have had such catastrophic consequences for Army Group Center. Tellingly, in the memoirs of both German and Soviet _ generals, the emphasis is always placed on unfavorable weather conditions hindering an offensive. Here is the commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, Marshal I.S. Konev, who was conducting an offensive at the same time along

neighborhood with Hausser, wrote in his memoirs: "Of all the operations described in this book, the most difficult was the Umansko-Botoshanskaya. The history of wars does not know of an operation wider in its scope and operational complexity, which would be carried out in conditions of complete impassability and spring flooding of rivers.

In my memory are indelible pictures of soldiers, officers and generals overcoming impassable sticky mud. I remember with what incredible difficulty the fighters pulled out

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cars stuck up to the very bodies, cannons drowned up to their carriages in the mud, hoarsely roaring tanks covered with black earth. At that time, human strength was the main force. On the contrary, when the weather favored one's own advance, this is practically never noted in the memoirs.

For example, during Operation Citadel, the weather was quite favorable for an offensive, but this fact was practically not reflected in the memoirs of the German participants in the operation. Both German and Soviet generals tried to use unfavorable weather conditions either to justify their failures or to emphasize that success was achieved despite the resistance of Mother Nature.

According to K.S. Moskalenko, "On March 25, at Hitler's Headquarters, it was decided to carry out its (German 1st Panzer Army. — B.S.) breakthrough in a westerly direction, organizing at the same time a counter strike 4- th tank army, reinforced by reserves transferred from the west.

In accordance with this decision, Colonel General Hube created three breakthrough groups. The main one, operating in the center, consisted of five tank, motorized and infantry divisions, and two flank groups had one tank and one infantry division each. The remaining divisions were intended to contain the onslaught of the Soviet troops and retreated behind the breakthrough groups.

Now the breakthrough was carried out in a western direction, with the main group withdrawing from the Lyantskoruni area to Borshchov, i.e., exactly where we had a gap on the inner front of the encirclement. Since the headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front continued to believe that the enemy was trying to break through to the south, beyond the Dniester, the efforts of our troops were still directed to NATO in order to cut off the Nazis from the crossings.

Thus, on their actual withdrawal routes, the enemy encountered an obviously insufficient barrier - the weakened units of our 4th Panzer Army and the 30th Rifle Corps.

On April 5, the enemy's second tank army, in separate units, having lost almost all of its equipment, joined up with the Podgaitsev grouping in the Buchach area on the river. Strype.

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The command of the 1st Ukrainian Front, in an attempt to prevent the enemy from breaking through, threw parts of two rifle corps on the march on the way of his movement. However, they were also unable to create a reliable barrier, engaging in battle on the move, often without artillery. The enemy rushed forward, not counting the losses. At the head of his grouping, which was breaking through to the north-west, was a powerful armored fist, consisting of tank divisions. An important role in the successful breakthrough of the enemy from the encirclement was played by the outburst of a three-day snow blizzard, which precluded the massive use of our aviation.

The next day, when a response to the ultimatum was expected, fierce battles were going on around the encircled enemy grouping on the entire front. In the western sector, individual groups

infantry with tanks managed to break through to the area of Tolstoy, Yagelnitsa. Overcome Seret, they cut the railroad and the Chortkiv-Zaleshchyky highway, and with them the communications of the 1st Panzer Army of General Katukov, which was lying behind the Dniester.

At the same time, the enemy showed activity on the outer front of the encirclement, in the area of Podgaitsa. Here, on this day, the Nazis, with forces up to an infantry regiment with 30 tanks, conducted reconnaissance in force. They didn't succeed. However, on the morning of April 53, the positions of the 18th Guards Rifle Corps in the area from Podgaitsa to Mariampol were attacked by superior forces of four divisions - the 100th and 367th Infantry, 9th and 10th SS Panzer. They pressed on shi parts to a depth of 10 km.

From that moment, after an unexpected strike by the enemy's strategic reserves for our command, the development of events both on the internal and external fronts of the encirclement showed that the enemy's 1st Panzer Army managed to avoid complete annihilation."

D. D. Lelyushenko, who commanded the 4th Panzer Army, differently than Moskulenko, determines the composition of the enemy's deblocking grouping: "At the same time, from the area of Podgaitsa, Buchach, the enemy forces the SS Panzer Corps (9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions), 100 th mountain rifle and 37th infantry divisions, deployed from the west, struck to the east

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towards the remnants of their 1st Panzer Army, which was making its way from the area of Kamenetz-Podolsk.

On April 5, the enemy's 1st Panzer Army in separate units, having lost almost all of its equipment, joined up with the Podgaytsevo grouping in the Buchach area on the river. Strype".

The historian of the German 16th Panzer Division wrote about the breakthrough near Buchach: "We received an order to damage and leave all motorized means, with the exception of combat vehicles (tanks and self-propelled guns. - D.L.) up to the commander's personal car divisions." Nevertheless, the bulk of the military equipment that had survived by the end of March was successfully withdrawn from the encirclement."

It is worth noting that Moskalenko, like other Soviet memoirists and historians, claims that the breakthrough in the Podgayts area was carried out by a relief force consisting of four divisions - two SS tank and two army infantry divisions - the 100th and the 367th. Let me note that if they all agree about the SS divisions, then about the infantry divisions there is still discord. As we remember, Lelyushenko names other divisions of the Wehrmacht than Moskalenko, namely: the 100th mountain rifle division (which is closer to the truth, although in fact the 100th division was called Jaeger (light infantry) and the 37th infantry. Hausser in his memoirs lists only two divisions that participated in the breakthrough, the Frundsberg Panzer Division and the 100th Light (Jäger) Division. as part of his corps, and not the 367th, which Moskalenko mentions. As for the 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen", it could not participate in the breakthrough to Buchach, since at that time it unsuccessfully tried to release Ternopil, surrounded by troops of the 60th Army on March 21. Its garrison surrendered only on April 1[4].

In his memoirs, Zhukov admits his mistake in carrying out the operation to defeat the enemy's 1st Panzer Army: "By the end of March, a grouping of 23 divisions, including ten tank, one motorized and one artillery, was basically surrounded.

To destroy the encircled group, they moved from

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east 18th and 38th armies; from the north, the 3rd and 4th tank armies struck. Part of the formations of the 1st Guards Army surrounded the Germans from the west and southwest, the 4th and 1st tank armies (with the exception of the 8th mechanized corps) went beyond the Dniester, cutting off the enemy's path to the south. Our troops, operating on the internal front, approached a decisive battle in an extremely weakened

condition, did not have the required amount of artillery and ammunition, which lagged behind the troops due to complete lack of roads, the 3rd Guards Tank Army, which had a small number of tanks in its ranks, suffered heavy losses and was withdrawn, on the instructions of the Supreme Commander, to the reserve for replenishment. By the end of March, the 4th Panzer Army was in the area of Kamenets-Podolsk (Kamenets-Podolsky), also in a significantly weakened state of research.

All this, taken together, did not ensure energetic actions of the troops to dismember and destroy the encircled enemy group. Now, analyzing this whole operation, I think that the 1st Panzer Army should have turned from the Chortkov-Tolstoy area to the east to strike at the encircled grouping. The Nomes then had solid data, obtained from various sources, about the decision of the encircled enemy to break through to the south across the Dniester in the area of Zalizchikov. Such a decision seemed quite possible and logical.

In this case, the enemy, having crossed the Dniester, could occupy the southern bank of the river and organize defense there. This was facilitated by the fact that the right-flank 40th Army of the 2nd Ukrainian Front on March 30 still did not approach Khotin.

We believed that under these conditions it was necessary to envelop the enemy with the 1st Panzer Army deeper, transferring its main forces across the Dniester, and seizing the Zalizchyky-Chernovitsy-Kolomiya region. To form an external front, the 8th mechanized and 11th rifle corps should be thrown into the area of Mariampol - Stanislav - Nadvirna. But when the German command of the Army Group "South" became aware of the interception of the withdrawal routes by the Soviet troops in

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in a southerly direction, it ordered the encircled troops to break through not to the south, but to the west through Buchach and Podgaitsy.

As it turned out later from the captured documents, the command of the Army Group "South" gathered a significant number of troops here, including the 9th and [10th SS Panzer Divisions], and on April 4 dealt a strong blow to our outer front from the Podgaitsa area. Having crushed the defenses of the 18th Corps and the 1st Guards Army, the enemy tank group rushed to the Buchach area towards its units emerging from the encirclement.

How many Nazis broke through from the encirclement, the Niya, nor the headquarters of the front could not exactly establish. There were different numbers. As it turned out later, it was not dozens of tanks with landing forces that emerged from the encirclement, as the troops then reported, but much more.

In the course of heavy fighting, the encircled enemy troops lost much more than half of their troops, all artillery, most of the tanks and assault guns. From some formations, only headquarters remained.

It is clear that Zhukov's subordinates tried in every possible way to minimize the number of enemy soldiers and military equipment that escaped from the ring. However, judging by the further course of events—the stabilization of the southern wing of the Soviet-German front following the breakthrough near Buchach—the main forces of the 1st Panzer Army were able to avoid destruction. In this, she was greatly assisted by the IP SS Panzer Corps.

If the breakthrough had not succeeded and the German 1st Panzer Army had been destroyed, this would have radically changed the strategic situation on the Soviet-German front. The annihilation of a grouping that, in terms of the number of divisions, even surpassed the one that was liquidated at one time in Stalingrad, could, even more radically than the defeat of the Paulus army, undermine the German ability to resist. Moreover, the forces of the Wehrmacht and its allies on the Eastern Front in the spring of 1944 were much weaker than at the beginning of 1943. Let's imagine what would happen if, in early April 1944, the German 1st Panzer Army was destroyed

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wife. And in such a development of events there would be nothing incredible. It was enough to transfer the Soviet 1st Panzer Army to the Western Encirclement Front, and one, even if fresh, SS Panzer Division would hardly be able to break the outer front of the encirclement. Moreover, in order to destroy such a powerful German grouping as the 1st Panzer Army, the Headquarters, if desired, could also use the armies of the neighboring 2nd Ukrainian Front, slowing down its invasion of Romania. The game was worth the candle. However, it seems that both Zhukov and Stalin again overestimated the success of the Red Army and wanted to achieve all the goals at once. Yes, and Zhukov, who was always jealous of Konev's successes, was probably in no hurry to turn to him for help. But if 23 divisions of the German 1st Panzer Army had really been destroyed, then, quite likely, Romania would have already then, in April 1944, withdrawn from the war and turned its weapons against the Germans. Hitler would have already then, apparently, would have lost both Romanian oil and the army, and his own army group "Southern Ukraine". Soviet troops would have already invaded Hungary in April, occupied Lvov, reached southern Poland. Hitler, most likely, would have had to withdraw troops from the "Belarusian balcony", and at the same time from the Baltic states, in order to release forces from the southern flank. Not only would it be necessary not only not to return the II SS Panzer Corps to the West, where an Anglo-American invasion was expected, but also to transfer some additional forces from France to the southern wing of the Eastern Front. Then, most likely, it would not have been necessary to carry out Operation Bagration, since the Germans themselves would have retreated to the border of Poland, where the Red Army would have already entered no later than May. The Western allies would break out more easily and quickly from the Normandy bridgehead. The Germans would not have had the strength either for the Ardennes counteroffensive or for large-scale counterattacks in Hungary. The war would have ended, quite possibly, by the end of 1944. So Hausser and his subordinates made a significant contribution to the fact that the war lasted a few extra months. The SS divisions could no longer influence its outcome.

SECRETS OF "STAR" AND FIGHTS OF "VIKING": BATTLE OUTSIDE CHERKASSY, KOVEL AND BELSKY

Before the failed attempt to encircle the German 1st Panzer Army, the Red Army carried out a more successful, although also not completely successful, operation against the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi (in German documents - Cherkassy) grouping of Germans. The most combat-ready units in this grouping were the SS Panzer Division "Viking" and the SS Assault Brigade "Wallonia" attached to this division.

It should be said that until now the history of the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi "boiler" (in German literature - the Cherkassy "boiler") is not sufficiently documented. Many Soviet and especially German documents, including those at the level of divisions, have not yet been published or introduced into scientific circulation. Probably, a significant part of the German documents was lost during the fighting in the "boiler". In this chapter, we use the materials of the study by Ilya Moshchansky "The Defeat near Cherkassy. Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi offensive operation January 24 - February 17, 1944

of the year". .

By the beginning of the battle near Cherkassy, at the end of December 1943, the 5th SS Viking Panzer Division numbered about 14.8 thousand people and had about 120 T-TU and Panther tanks and assault guns. The division was commanded by Obergruppenführer Herbert Gille. The 5th SS Motorized Brigade "Wallonia" had about 2,000 personnel and had a battery of 18 assault guns. Operationally, it was subordinate to the Viking. commanded a brigade

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Sturmbannführer Lucien Lipert, a Walloon by nationality. Volunteers, both Germans and Dutch, Norwegians, Danes, Swedes, Flemings, prevailed in both formations of the SS, and Walloons dominated in the Walloon Brigade. In addition, the division "Viking" was attached to the volunteer battalion "Narva", which consisted mainly of Estonians.

By the beginning of the attack on the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi ledge on January 24, 1944, the 1st Ukrainian Front had 335 tanks and self-propelled guns, and the 2nd Ukrainian Front had 335

units of armored vehicles. On January 27, Viking, together with three infantry divisions from the Pastorsky area, launched a counterattack on the grouping of the 2nd Ukrainian Front advancing on Shpola. Fights began with units of the 4th Guards Army. During the three-day battles, individual detachments of German tanks with infantry managed to reach the communications of the advancing Soviet troops several times, but in the end, by January 29, they were driven back. According to Manstein, during this counterattack "the first blow was delivered by Taki Ztk in the eastern part of this gap against the 40th army of the enemy. Then, also with a concentric strike by the Ztka 26 TK, in which, in addition to the tank divisions, the 1st Infantry Division, 4th Guards Rifle Division 18 Hell, large forces of the Soviet 1st Tank Army were surrounded and defeated in the western part of the gap. As a result of the last blow - I do not have data on the first blow - the enemy lost, along with 8,000 killed, only 5,500 prisoners, 700 tanks, over 200 guns and about 500 anti-tank guns.

However, these losses still did not stop the offensive of the Soviet troops. On January 28, the 5th Mechanized Corps of the 1st Ukrainian Front and the 20th Tank Corps of the 2nd Ukrainian Front met in the Zvenigorodka area, closing the encirclement. The encircled troops had more than 200 tanks and assault guns as part of the Viking division and three assault gun battalions. The group was led by the commander of the 11th Army Corps, General Wilhelm Stemmerman. According to the command of Army Group South, the number of troops encircled reached 55,000

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wii. This means that the number of those surrounded could not be higher than this figure. The 1st Panzer Army of General Hans Hube began to create a deblocking group. Hube sent. into the "cauldron" a radiogram, promising to rescue those surrounded. The commander of the 3rd Panzer Corps, General Breit, also promised to go. This corps formed the basis of the deblocking grouping. It also included the SS division "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler". Beginning on February 4, the encircled themselves tried to break out of the ring, which the Soviet troops were steadily squeezing. By February 8, the entire territory occupied by the Stemmerman group was shot through by Soviet artillery. On the same day, the encircled were presented with an ultimatum to surrender, which was rejected. The ultimatum read:

"Commander of the 42nd Army Corps. Commander of the 11th Army Corps.

Commanders 112, 88, 72, 167, 168, 82, 57

and the 332nd Infantry Division, the 213th Security Division, the SS Viking Panzer Division, and the Wallonia motorized brigade. To the entire officer corps of the German troops surrounded in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi area.

The 42nd and 11th army corps of the German army are in complete encirclement.

The troops of the Red Army surrounded this grouping with an iron ring. The encirclement ring is shrinking more and more. All your hopes for salvation are in vain...

Attempts to help you with ammunition and fuel through transport aircraft have failed. In just two days, on February 4, over 100 Yu-52 planes were shot down by the ground and air forces of the Red Army.

You, as commanders and officers of encircled units, understand very well that there are no real possibilities to break through the encirclement.

Your position is hopeless and further resistance is pointless. It will only lead to huge casualties among the German soldiers and officers.

In order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, we propose to accept the following terms of surrender:

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1. All encircled German troops led by you and your headquarters immediately cease hostilities.
2. You hand over to us all personnel, weapons, all combat equipment, vehicles and all equipment intact.

We guarantee all officers and soldiers who have ceased resistance, life and safety, and after the end of the war - return to Germany or to any other country at the personal request of prisoners of war.

All personnel of the surrendered units will be kept: military uniform, insignia and orders, personal property and valuables, and the senior officers, in addition, cold weapons will be kept.

All the wounded and sick will receive medical assistance.

All surrendered officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers will be immediately provided with food.

Your answer is expected by 11 am February 9, 1944 Moscow time in writing through your personal representatives, who are to drive in a white-flagged car along the road going from Korsun-Shevchenkovsky through Steblev to Khirovka.

Your representative will be met by an authorized Russian officer in the area of the eastern outskirts of Khirovka on February 9, 1944 at [[]] hours Moscow time.

If you reject our proposal to lay down your arms, then the troops of the Red Army and the air fleet will begin actions to destroy your encircled troops, and you will bear responsibility for their destruction.

Deputy Supreme Commander

Marshal of the Soviet Union G. Zhukov

Commander of the First Ukrainian Front Army General N. Vatutin

Commander of the Second Ukrainian Front Army General I. Konev.

The number of downed "Junkers" in the text of the ultimatum, perhaps for propaganda purposes, is exaggerated. However, there is no doubt that the loss of low-speed transport workers is very

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weakly covered by fighters, in the conditions of air supremacy of Soviet aviation were great. It was already surprising that the Korsun "cauldron" still managed to be supplied at the very least with the help of an air bridge as long as the landing sites remained in the hands of the encircled. Thus, from February 3 to February 16, German transport aviation made almost 900 sorties into the "cauldron", delivering ammunition, fuel and food and evacuating the wounded. On February 14, after the capture of Korsun-Shevchenkovsky, the last landing site passed into the hands of the Soviet troops, after which the cargo had to be dropped from aircraft. The evacuation of the wounded stopped.

The attempts of the German 8th Army to break through to the encircled divisions through the battle formations of the 2nd Ukrainian Front of General I.S. Konev (on February 20, he was promoted to marshal for the liquidation of the Korsun-Shevchenko group) ended in vain. The deblocking group of the 1st Tank Army, consisting of the Leibstandarte and three tank divisions of the Wehrmacht, acted more successfully against the 1st Ukrainian Front, General N.F. Vatutin (February 29, 1944

he was mortally wounded by soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army). She managed to wedge herself into the positions of the 47th Rifle Corps. After that, Vatutin brought into battle the 2nd tank army of General S.I. Bogdanov, which had just arrived from the Stavka reserve and numbered 326 tanks and self-propelled guns. This army attacked the enemy on the morning of February 6 in cooperation with units of the 40th and 6th tank armies. As a result of the oncoming tank battle, the advance of the German 3rd Panzer Corps was stopped, but it held the penetration. On February 8, the 8th Guards Tank Brigade of the 20th Tank Corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army was advanced to the Lisyanka area in case the enemy offensive continued, along with the 1895th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment and one regiment of the 31st anti-tank brigade. Other brigades of the 20th, 18th, and 29th Tank Corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army blocked roads in the areas of Kazatskoye, Tarasovka, Topilno, and Serdegovka.

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On February 11, the German 8th and 1st Panzer armies resumed their attack on Lisyanka from two directions. Simultaneously surrounded by the forces of two infantry divisions and the Viking Panzer Division and the Wallonia Brigade, they tried to break through Shenderovka to Lisyanka. If the German plan was successful, the Soviet troops operating in the triangle of Ryzhanovka, Lisyanka, Zvenigorodka would themselves be surrounded.

In the zone of the 2nd Ukrainian Front on the outer front of the encirclement, the enemy managed to push back units of the 49th Rifle Corps and occupy the stations of Zvenigorodka, Yerki and Skalevatka. Only the brigades of the 20th Panzer Corps could stop the further advance of the Germans. In the zone of the 1st Ukrainian Front, the German strike force advancing from the Rizino region broke through the defenses of the 47th Rifle Corps and captured Lisyanka. On the night of February 12, the encircled began a breakthrough from the Steblevo area on a narrow front of 4.5 km. The Viking motorized infantry battalion was at the forefront, followed by the Deutschland motorized (panzer-grenadier) regiment. They managed to push the units of the 27th Army and go to the Shenderovka area. The distance to the Leibstandarte and other divisions of the III Panzer Corps was reduced to 10-12 km.

Konev, having learned about the breakthrough of the Germans in the Vatutin sector, called Stalin and offered to transfer to him, Konev, the leadership of all troops on the internal front of the encirclement, transferring the 27th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front to the 2nd Ukrainian Front. Stalin agreed with this proposal. Zhukov was instructed to coordinate the actions of Vatutin's troops on the outer front of the encirclement.

Konev described these events in his memoirs as follows:

"...the encircled enemy grouping managed to break through to the area of Shenderovka, Novo-Buda in the sector of the 27th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

The Headquarters of the Supreme High Command showed concern in connection with the breakthrough of the enemy troops. February 12, 1944 at about 12 noon. The Supreme Commander-in-Chief called me over HF.

Stalin, angry, said that now we announced

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the whole world, that a large enemy grouping was surrounded in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi area, and at Headquarters there is information that the encircled grouping broke through the front of the 27th Army and is leaving for its own people, and asked: "What do you know about the situation at the neighbor's front?"

, From the intonation of his voice, the sharpness with which he spoke, I understood that the Supreme Commander-in-Chief was alarmed, and, apparently, the reason for this is someone's not entirely accurate report.

I reported:

"Don't worry, Comrade Stalin. The surrounded enemy will not leave. Our front has taken action. In order to secure a junction with the 1st Ukrainian Front and in order to drive the enemy back into the "cauldron", I moved the troops of the 5th Guards Tank Army and the 5th Cavalry Corps into the area of the enemy's breakthrough. They complete the task successfully.

Stalin asked:

Did you do this on your own initiative? After all, this is beyond the front line.

I answered:

"Yes, in my own way, Comrade Stalin.

Stalin said:

- This is very good. We will consult at Headquarters, and I will call you.

Indeed, after 10-15 minutes. Stalin called again:

- Is it possible to subordinate all troops operating against the encircled grouping, including the 1st Ukrainian Front (27th Army), to you and entrust to you the leadership of the destruction of the encircled grouping?

I did not expect such an offer, but I answered without a pause:

— Comrade Stalin, it is very difficult now to transfer the 27th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front to me. The 27th Army operates from the back side of the encirclement, that is, from the opposite side of our troops, from a different operational direction. The entire army and its communications with the headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front go through Bila Tserkva and Kyiv. Therefore, I will be very much in control of the army.

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It is difficult, difficult to communicate along the circumference of the entire ring through Kremenchug, Kyiv, Belaya Tserkov; while the battle is going on in the corridor, it is impossible to establish direct contact with the 27th Army. The army is very weak, stretched out on a wide front. She will not be able to hold the encircled enemy, while on her right flank there is also a threat of an enemy tank attack from the outer front of the encirclement in the direction of Lisyanka.

On this, Stalin said that the Stavka would oblige the headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front to transmit all my orders and instructions to the 27th Army and leave it to be supplied to the 1st Ukrainian Front. I replied that in such a dynamic environment, this form of management would not ensure the reliability and speed of the transmission of orders. And now you need personal communication and communication in a short way.

All orders will be delayed. I asked not to transfer the army to our front.

"Very well, we will consult at the Headquarters and with the General Staff, and then we will decide," Stalin finished the conversation.

I persistently avoided subordinating the 27th Army to me also because when the plan of interaction between the fronts is violated, the reassignment of troops becomes seriously complicated. I was genuinely worried about the outcome of the battle. After all, the transfer of the army to me did not increase its strength.

In his memoirs, Marshal G.K. Zhukov did not quite accurately elucidate this issue. Recalling his telephone conversation with the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, he writes: "I. V. Stalin said: 'Konev proposes to transfer to him the leadership of the troops in liquidating the enemy's Korsun-Shevchenko group, and to concentrate the leadership of the troops on the external front in the hands of Vatutin.'"

Everyone will understand that in such a difficult situation it is hardly expedient to ask for the reassignment of troops, without knowing thoroughly the situation in the neighbour's sector. In fact, on February 12, 1944, on the VC, Stalin, placing responsibility on me for the liquidation of the encircled group, himself insisted on subordinating the 27th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front to me. I, having stated my motives, persistently refused this. .

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In fact, the breakthrough of the fascist German group nevertheless occurred in the sector of the 1st Ukrainian Front, at the turn of Shanderovka, Khilki, where the 27th Army was defending.

Here it would be appropriate to quote J. V. Stalin's telegram to G. K. Zhukov.

"Tov. Yuryev (pseudonym G. K. Zhukov. - B. S.).

The breakthrough of the Korsun enemy grouping from the Steblev area in the direction of Shanderovka occurred because:

the 27th army, weak in its composition, was not reinforced in a timely manner;

no decisive measures were taken to fulfill my instructions to destroy the enemy's Steblevsky ledge in the first place, from where attempts to break through it could most likely be expected ...

There are enough forces and means on the left wing of the 1st Ukrainian Front and on the right wing of the 2nd Ukrainian Front to eliminate the enemy's breakthrough and destroy his Korsun grouping.

February 12, 1944

16 hours 45 minutes

I. Stalin Antonov "(Deputy Chief of the General Staff. - B.S.).

February 12 at 4 p.m. I received an important decision from the Headquarters on the HF, which made me responsible for the destruction of the encircled grouping. Then this directive was confirmed
in writing:

"Commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front. Commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front. Tov. Yuriev.

In view of the fact that in order to eliminate the Korsun grouping of the enemy, it is necessary to unite the efforts of all troops operating with this task, and since most of these troops belong to the 2nd Ukrainian Front, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command orders:

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1. Assign the leadership of all troops operating against the Korsun grouping of the enemy to the commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front with the task of destroying the Korsun grouping of Germans as soon as possible.

In accordance with this, the 27th Army, consisting of 180, 337, 202 rifle divisions, 54, 159 SD and all available reinforcement units, will be transferred from 24 hours on 12.2.44 to the operational subordination of the commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front. Leave the supply of 27 A with all types behind the 1st Ukrainian Front.

Commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front to have contact with the headquarters of the 27th Army until direct communication is established through the headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

2. Tov. Yuryev to be released from monitoring the liquidation of the Korsun grouping of Germans and entrusted to him to coordinate the actions of the troops of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts with the task of preventing the enemy from breaking through from Lisyanok and Zvenigorodka to connect with the Korsun grouping of the enemy " .

The same Directive of the Stavka entrusted the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts with the task of preventing the enemy from breaking through from Lisyanok and Zvenigorodka to link up with the enemy's Korsun grouping.

At the same time, the issue of the distribution of aviation efforts was resolved. The 5th Air Army was given the task of supporting the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front with all its might during the destruction of the encircled enemy grouping, and the 2nd Air Army was given the task of fighting enemy aircraft that were trying to help the encircled...

Intelligence data indicated that the Nazis would make an attempt to break out of the encirclement. Driven into a limited area adjacent to the settlement of Shanderovka, they had one of two options: either to surrender, or to break through. Having lost all hope of outside help, the command of the encircled group decided to make a last desperate attempt to break out of the "cauldron" on the night of February 17.

According to intelligence data and testimonies of prisoners, in

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On the night of February 6 and during the day, regrouping and concentration of forces in the Shanderovka area were carried out in order to break through the encirclement in the direction of Lisyanok on the night of February 17.

The battle order of the breaking through troops was built in several echelons. The 72nd, 112th Infantry Divisions and the SS Viking Panzer Division were assigned to the first echelon. Directly behind the tank units of the latter, under the cover of assault guns and submachine gunners, was the command of the encircled group - the headquarters of formations and officers up to and including regimental commanders. Further, carts with the wounded and sanitary institutions of the NIA moved.

The second echelon consisted of all other units and divisions of the encircled troops. The 88th Infantry Division was assigned to provide cover from the north and east. From the south, the breaking through group was provided with units of the 57th Infantry Division.

It was planned to break through the encirclement on a front 4.5 km wide. On the right flank, the 112th Infantry Division was to advance - in the direction of Khizhintsy and further - to join with its troops. In the center, in the direction of Shanderovka, north of Komarovka, at a height of 239.0 m above Lisyanok, the SS Panzer Division "Viking" was preparing to operate, the battle order of which was also built in several echelons.

A fusilier battalion, reinforced with tanks and assault guns, was to move ahead, followed by the motorized regiment "Westland", the motorized brigade of the SS "Wallonia", the battalion "Narva" and the motorized regiment "Germany". On the left through Komarovka, the 72nd Infantry was supposed to advance on Lisyanok division.

Having concentrated large forces on a narrow sector of the front, Stemmermann hoped, with the help of the remnants of divisions, to break through the front of our troops by sudden night actions and withdraw the senior officers and headquarters from the encirclement.

The Nazis wanted, using the night, poor visibility, snowfall and blizzard, to break through and quietly slip out of

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rings, but the strikes of our aircraft and artillery mixed up their plans.

After the bombing and artillery shelling, the enemy needed time to put himself in order, and thus his surprise calculations failed.

And even in such a hopeless situation for the encircled German fascist troops, the Nazi monsters continued to commit flagrant atrocities. In Shanderovka they herded the villagers into a church and school and set them on fire. Fascist bandits ran around the huts and shot defenseless old men, women and children, burned houses. From the burning church, from the school, from the huts came cries of despair and curses against the executioners.

All our troops that took part in the defeat of the encircled group were warned about the intentions of the Nazis. The command of all levels, officers of staffs, commanders of units and subunits, gun and tank crews - all were in their places and were waiting for the enemy.

At 3 a.m., the Nazis moved in thick columns from the area of Shanderovka, Khilki to our positions.

The onslaught of the enemy was taken over by units of the 27th and 4th Guards armies. The command was immediately given to the 18th and 29th Tank Corps and the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps to advance towards each other, to capture or destroy the enemy. Even the Nazis themselves already understood the recklessness of the actions of their command.

About the situation, one of the captured officers of the 57th Infantry Division said:

"By the evening of February 16, in order to break out of the encirclement in the Shanderovka area, all formations of the 11th and 42nd army corps were concentrated. At the headquarters of the 157th Artillery Regiment, an order was read, where it was said that on the night of February 17, a breakthrough of the encirclement was being carried out and that we were ensuring a breakthrough from the south ...

The guns of my division took up firing positions among the convoys that blocked the entire settlement of Shanderovka, which was subjected to heavy Russian artillery fire ...

The main road was clogged with stopped and

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broken transport, and it was not possible to move along it. On a small section of the road to Lisyanka, I saw a huge number of killed Germans. The mass of convoys blocked not only the roads, but also the fields and could not move on.

Here is the testimony of another captured officer:

"... No one left the encirclement. All the roads were clogged with traffic, there was an incredible mess all around. Everything was mixed into one stream. Everyone fled, and no one knew where he was running and why. Broken cars, guns, wagons and hundreds of corpses of soldiers and officers were lying on the roads and off the roads.

This is all true.

We took every measure to ensure that not one of the Nazis left the encirclement.

It was impossible to penetrate four lines of defense - two on the inner and two on the outer front of the encirclement, and, moreover, in the center of the corridor to pass by anti-tank areas, destructive artillery was impossible. Here again anti-tank areas played a big role. Artillerymen proved to be true masters of their craft. There are many examples of their heroism. For example, when on February 17, under the cover of darkness, in a blizzard, numerous

Enemy groups, together with tanks, tried to break out of the encirclement, they ran into the gun of Senior Sergeant A.E. Kharitonov, a soldier of the 438th Cherkasy anti-tank fighter regiment. Letting the enemy close, Kharitonov's men opened heavy fire. Shooting from cannons and machine guns, the Kharitonovites destroyed over 100 enemy soldiers and officers, recaptured a large convoy from the Germans. For this feat, Senior Sergeant A. Kharitonov was awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union by decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on March 24, 1945.

There are many similar examples of courage and courage of artillerymen in anti-tank areas. —

But not only these powerful artillery barriers stood in the way of the Germans' exit from the encirclement. The Nazis coming out of the "cauldron" were attacked not only by the defense forces, but mainly by reserves, mobile strike groups, tank corps of Rotmistrov's army and a cavalry corporal.

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pus Selivanova. They were at the mouth of the corridor, on the flanks of the supposed breakthrough, and received orders to advance between 2 and 3 o'clock. morning, i.e. to the moment when the Nazis began to approach our forward defense positions.

The tanks acted with headlights on, fire and maneuver, they crowded the enemy, did not give him the opportunity to get out of the "cauldron". Cossacks in the morning with swords naked rushed across the battlefield, took the fleeing Nazis prisoner. The soldiers fought hand-to-hand, with bayonets, machine guns, and carbines.

When dawn came, the Germans, seeing the hopelessness of their situation, began to surrender in large groups. Throughout this skirmish, I spoke several times with the commanders of the 69th, 7th and 41st divisions, who occupied positions along the banks of the Gorny Tikich River on the outer front of the encirclement. They reported that not a single German soldier passed through their lines. I also spoke with army commanders Smirnov, Grofimenko, Rotmistrov, Galanin, closely followed their actions, reports and reports, and it was not said in the water report and report that the Germans passed through any point or line of our troops occupying the defense both on the external and internal fronts.

Captured soldiers and officers from the SS division "Viking" said:

"Our division, which numbered about 7 thousand soldiers and officers, lost more than 4 thousand people in two weeks. We had to retreat under heavy Russian fire. There were roads. filled with abandoned vehicles and weapons. We were in despair. On the night of February 17, the soldiers were given a reinforced portion of vodka and were allowed to eat an inviolable supply of food. At 2 o'clock an order was announced stating that there was nothing more to count on outside help ...

Guns, vehicles, all military equipment and even personal belongings were ordered to be abandoned. We had hardly gone 300 meters when Russian tanks attacked us. The Cossacks appeared behind the tanks."

Yes, the cavalry "worked" well.

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General Gille, apparently, took off by plane before the start of the fight, or crawled through the front line dressed in civilian clothes. I rule out that he made his way on a tank or transporter through our positions and strong points.

By the morning of February 17, the enemy grouping was finished. Tens of thousands of German soldiers paid with their lives for the senseless and criminal stubbornness of the Hitlerite command, which rejected our ultimatum to surrender on February 8th. The military career of many German generals also ended tragically.

I must say right away that in Konev's memoirs there is a lot of purely propaganda fiction. It does not inspire confidence, for example, the story about the Viking fighters, when they break through the encirclement, they burn the huts and shoot civilians. Would they spend on it so scarce during the breakthrough time, fuel and ammo! There is one of two things: either all this is a pure notion of political detachments, or it is actually about a battle with partisans who really operated in that area and whom the Germans had to deal with when breaking out of the encirclement. The statements of the prisoners that no one had left the encirclement were intended, first of all, to satisfy the explicit wishes of those who interrogated them. In addition, to the soldiers and officers who were taken prisoner, it could subjectively seem that no one managed to break out of the "cauldron" at all. But in fact, as we well know, tens of thousands of those surrounded at Korsun-Shevchenkovsky managed to break through the ring and unite with their own. And the Viking, which at the time of the encirclement numbered 7 thousand people, could not lose more than 4 thousand people in the encirclement and during the breakthrough, since 4.5 thousand soldiers and officers of the division escaped from the "cauldron". From where in the "cauldron" there could be a "strengthened portion of vodka" for everyone, probably only Konev himself knew, who, however, hardly drank alcohol due to a stomach illness. If, during the encirclement, there was a certain amount of schnapps in the "cauldron", then it had long been exterminated "for the sake of warming up" during the two-week encirclement. It is unlikely that the "Vikings" and other surrounded scoured in search of moonshine for approx.

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rustic villages. And it is doubtful that the peasants then had something to drive moonshine from. Schnapps was definitely not delivered to the "cauldron" by planes. In addition, a few days before the breakthrough, flights stopped. However, in Soviet propaganda, there was a premise that the Germans, and especially the SS, usually go drunk on the attack. Moreover, before the offensive, the Red Army soldiers were given a portion of vodka or alcohol. So the facts were adjusted to fit the propaganda scheme.

Vatutin did not live to see his memoirs, and Zhukov, who at one time patronized Nikolai Fedorovich and never had great love for Ivan Stepanovich, in his memoirs gives a slightly different version of the reassignment of the 27th Army to the 2nd Ukrainian Front:

"On the night of February 12, the encircled group of troops, having gathered in a narrow area, also tried to break through Steblev to Lisyanka to join up with tank divisions. She even managed to reach the Shenderovka area, but the further advance of the enemy was suspended. The distance between the encircled group and the releasing group of German troops was reduced to 12 kilometers, but it was felt that the enemy did not have enough forces to connect.

On the night of February 12, 1944, I sent a report to Headquarters:

"At Kravchenko:

- the enemy with a strength of up to 160 tanks with motorized infantry from the front of Rizino - Chemeriskoye - Tarasovka is advancing in the general direction towards Lisyanka and, having broken through the first line of the 47th Rifle Corps, wedged into the defense up to 19 km.

Further advance of the enemy was stopped on the Gnilyo Tych River by units of the 340th Rifle Division and the 5th Mechanized Corps, which constituted the second line of defense, and reserve regiments of SU-85.

Due to the lack of communication with the commander of the 47th Rifle Corps, the situation on the left flank of the army in the direction of Zhabinka - Rizino - Dubrovka is being specified.

Kravchenko had enough forces and means to repel enemy attacks, but Kravchenko lost control of the army units when breaking through the first line of our defense.

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He ordered Nikolaev (pseudonym N. F. Vatutin. — B. S.) to urgently deploy the command of the 27th Army to Dzhurzhentsy and subordinate Kravchenko to Trofimenko in operational terms.

By the morning of February 12, Bogdanov's army should be concentrated with the main forces in the area of Lisyanka - Dashukovka - Chesnovka. Deploy the 202nd Rifle Division at the Khizhintsy-Dzhurzhentsy line, and bring up the fully equipped Katukov brigade there.

Stepin (pseudonym I.S. Konev. - B.S.) ordered in Lisyanka by morning to have two brigades from Rotmistrov and take up defense along the Rotten Tkich River in the Lisyanka-Murzintsy section, and first of all, anti-tank.

Stepin's:

— Rotmistrov's army today repelled attacks of up to 60 enemy tanks from Yerkov in the direction of Zvenigorodka. Intelligence established the movement of up to 40 tanks from Kapustin to Yerki. It is possible that the enemy is pulling up tanks from the Lebedinsky direction to the Zvenigorod direction.

Stepin kutra On February 12, the 18th Tank Corps moves to Mikhailovka (east of Zvenigorodka) and the 29th Tank Corps to the Knyazhye-Lozovatka area.

Smirnov's army fought for Miropolye, Koshak, Glushki.

For ease of control, from 12.00 on February 12, Trofimenko's 180th Rifle Division is transferred to the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

On 12.2.44, he ordered Stepin to strike with the main forces of the armies of Koroteev and Smirnov from the east on Steblevi to the rear of the main grouping of the encircled enemy, which was preparing to go out to meet the advancing tank group.

All night aviation of the fronts operates in the Steblev area.

Zhukov".

On the morning of February 12, I came down with the flu and was put to bed with a high temperature. Warmed up, he fell asleep. I don't know how much I slept, I feel, with all my might, my gene

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Adjutant Leonid Fedorovich Minyuk is trying to push me aside. I ask:

- What's the matter?

Comrade Stalin is calling.

Jumping out of bed, he picked up the phone.

"Konev called me just now," said the Supreme Commander, "and reported that the enemy had broken through at Vatutin at night from the Shenderovka area to Khilki and Novaya Buda. Do you know about it?"

- No, I do not know. I think this is not true.

° — —_ Check and report back.

I immediately called N.F. Vatutin and found out that the enemy really tried, using a snowstorm, to break out of the encirclement and had already managed to advance two or three kilometers and occupied Khilki, but was stopped. Information about attempts to break through somehow got to I. S. Konev earlier. Instead of urgently reporting to me and notifying N.F. Vatutin, he called I.V. Stalin, making it clear that the operation to eliminate the enemy could fail if he was not entrusted with its completion.

After talking with N. F. Vatutin about the adoption of additional measures, I called the Supreme Commander and reported to him what I had learned from the report of the Commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

J. V. Stalin strongly scolded me and N. F. Vatutin, and then said:

- Konev proposes to transfer to him the leadership of the troops of the internal front to liquidate the Korsun-Shevchenko enemy group, and to concentrate the leadership of the troops on the external front in the hands of Vatutin.

- The final destruction of the enemy group located in the "boiler" is a matter of three or four days. The main role in the Korsun-Shevchenko operation was played by the 1st Ukrainian Front. Vatutin and the troops led by him will be offended if they are not marked for their military labors. The transfer of command and control of the 27th Army to the 2nd Ukrainian Front may delay the course of the operation.

JV Stalin said in an irritated tone:

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- Fine. Let Vatutin personally deal with the operation of the 13th and 60th armies in the Rovno-Lutsik-Dubno area, and you take responsibility for preventing the enemy from breaking through from the Lisiansk area. All. |

However, a couple of hours later a directive was received with the following content...

N. F. Vatutin was a very impressionable person. Having received the directive, he immediately called me and, believing that all this was the work of my hands, said with resentment:

- Comrade Marshal, someone, but you know that I, without closing my eyes for several days in a row, strained all my strength to carry out the Korsun-Shevchenko operation. Why are they now removing me and not letting me complete this operation? I am also a patriot of the troops of my front and I want the capital of our Motherland, Moscow, to salute the soldiers of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

I could not tell N. F. Vatutin whose proposal it was, so as not to pit him against I. S. Konev. However, I believed that in this case N. F. Vatutin was right as a commander, taking care of the combat, well-deserved glory of the troops entrusted to him.

— Nikolay Fedorovich, this is the order of the Supreme Commander, we are soldiers, let's obey the order unconditionally.

N. F. Vatutin replied:

- Listen, the order will be carried out.

However, all this left a bad aftertaste in my soul. I was dissatisfied with the fact that JV Stalin did not consider it necessary in this case to delve into the psychology of the troops and military leaders. I. V. Stalin was an intelligent person and had to calmly deal with the current situation and, foreseeing how it would eventually end, resolve the issue without excessive nervousness, which so unreasonably hurt the soul of the remarkable commander N. F. Vatutin.

Zhukov, like Konev, describes in some detail the final attempt to break through the Korsun Shevchenko group from the encirclement:

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"After February 12, the enemy, no matter how hard he tried to break through from the Shandorovka area to Lisiansk, succeeded didn't have.

On February 14, troops of the 52nd Army of the 2nd Ukrainian Front occupied the city of Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi. The ring around the encircled continued to shrink. It became clear to the soldiers, officers and generals of the German troops that the help promised to them would not come, they had to rely only on themselves. According to the stories of the prisoners, the troops were seized with complete despair, especially when they became aware of the flight on airplanes of some generals - division commanders and staff officers.

On the night of February 16, a snowstorm broke out. Visibility was reduced to 10-20 meters. The Germans again had a hope of slipping into Lisiansk to join the Hube group. Their attempt to break through was repulsed by the 27th Army of S. G. Trofimenko and the 4th Guards Army of the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

The cadets of the training battalion of the 4th Guards Rifle Division, Major General KN Tsvetkov, fought especially heroically. All morning on February 17, a fierce battle went on to destroy the columns of German troops that had broken through, which were mostly destroyed and captured. Only a few tanks and armored personnel carriers with generals, officers and SS men managed to break out of the encirclement and slip from the area of the village of Pochapintsi to the area of Lisiansk.

As we expected, on February 17, everything was finished with the encircled grouping. According to the 2nd Ukrainian Front, 18 thousand people and military equipment of this group were taken prisoner.

On February 18, the capital of our Motherland saluted the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front. And not a single word was said about the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

As a former Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief, to whom the troops of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts were equally close and dear, I must say that I.V. of the Ukrainian Front, who, like the soldiers of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, not sparing their lives, heroically fought against the enemy

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Russian troops where the front command and the Headquarters sent them. Regardless of who and what reported to I. V. Stalin, he had to be objective in assessing the actions of both fronts. Why I.V. Stalin allowed such an injustice is unclear to me to this day. This remarkable operation was organized and carried out by the troops of two fronts. I think it was an unforgivable mistake of the Supreme.

As is known, the success of the encirclement and destruction of an enemy grouping depends on the actions of both the internal and external fronts. Both fronts, led by N. F. Vatutin and I. S. Konev, fought equally well."

It has long been known that Zhukov and Konev strongly disliked each other and were jealous of military successes. In this case, the description of events by the former Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief looks more plausible. After all, Zhukov cites the text of his report to Stalin on the night of February 12, from which it is clear that it was Zhukov who ordered Konev ("Stepin") to put forward units of Rotmistrov's army for a possible interception of the encircled group that was breaking through. Konev, on the other hand, attributed this initiative entirely to himself, arguing that it was precisely this that prompted Stalin to hand over to him the task of liquidating the encircled group, while he himself never made such proposals to Stalin. They say that it was difficult to manage the 27th Army, and it was inconvenient in front of Vatutin. I think that, in fact, Zhukov was right about the fact that it was precisely at Konev's suggestion that Stalin handed over to him the command of all the troops on the inner front of the encirclement.

Zhukov more objectively than Konev describes the breakthrough of Stemmermann's group, recognizing that at least some tanks and armored personnel carriers managed to break out of the encirclement. In addition, its text in this case is practically devoid of propaganda agitation.

How did the breakthrough really happen? By February 16, the encircled German troops occupied only a small area between three villages - Khilki, Shenderovka and Komarovka.

Stemmerman decided on the night of February 17 before

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take the last attempt to break through from Shenderovka. By that time, the offensive of both deblocking groups had already been stopped.

Breakthrough Stemmerman led his troops in three columns. In the central column in the first echelon, Viking and Wallonia broke through. In the middle of the columns followed the headquarters of Stemmermann and the commander of the XE corps, General Lieb. Stemmerman walked in the Viking and Wallonia column. The Germans were helped by a snowstorm that broke out on the night of February 16-17, excluding the actions of Soviet aviation. And it was difficult for artillery to fire in conditions when visibility was almost zero.

That same night, Konev was informed of the concentration of encircled troops in Shenderovka. He ordered to send 18 PO-2 aircraft of the 382nd regiment of the 312th night bomber division to bomb Shenderovka. Their crews consisted only of volunteers. The planes were able to drop incendiary bombs, after which the Germans were fired upon by artillery, but without much success. At 4 o'clock in the morning, the breakthrough columns reached the Soviet trenches. The blow was taken by the divisions of the 27th, 4th Guards and 5th Guards Tank Armies. At the cost of heavy losses, the Germans broke through to the outskirts of the villages of Dzhurzhentsy and Pochapintsy. The enemy was attacked by units of the 18th and 29th tank and 5th guards cavalry corps. However, a significant part of the encircled managed to break through to Lisyanka and connect with the deblocking group. The headquarters of the corps and divisions also broke through. General Stemmerman, who, like other generals, walked along with his soldiers, died on the battlefield. According to the testimony of Chief Corporal Gerhard Müller, who was taken prisoner by the Soviets, who broke through with the same group, no visible injuries were found on the body of the general. He most likely died of a broken heart. In any case, there were no armored personnel carriers in which, according to Konev, staff officers and generals allegedly broke through. Commander HLJ. corps, General Lieb and 7 officers of his headquarters left the encirclement in horseback formation. The same commander of the "Wallonia" brigade, Leon Degrel, who took command

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after the death of Lippmann, he led his people into the attack, being seriously wounded and with a high temperature. The surviving Viking tanks helped the remnants of the Wallonia escape from the deadly ring. Degrel recalled: "Cars and carts overturned, and the wounded, screaming, fell to the frozen ground. A wave of Soviet tanks swept over our advanced vehicles and carts. In an instant, half of our column was destroyed. The wave of tanks irresistibly, albeit slowly, approached us, making its way straight through the horse-drawn column, crushing cars and carts like matchboxes, crushing the wounded and dying horses harnessed to the wagons with their caterpillars ... Our seemingly inevitable death. However, it was delayed for a short time due to the resulting "traffic jam" – the Red tanks literally got stuck in the column, unable to disperse the remains of hundreds of cars and carts, crushed by their powerful tracks.

By the end of February 17, the battle was over. On February 18, the last scattered groups of the encircled were liquidated.

The captured doctor of the Viking division testified during interrogation: "Our infirmary and dressing station in Korsun. For the period from February 1 to February 14, we received 440 lightly wounded soldiers and officers. Seriously wounded were not admitted to the infirmary. I know that the officers, following Hitler's order, shot all seriously wounded German soldiers.

There can be no doubt that the Viking doctor did not say anything of the sort, even if the interrogation actually took place. It was a notion either of the "smershevite" or the translator of the special propagandist, who interrogated the prisoner. It was ideally suited for leaflets, which were generously scattered over the surrounded Soviet aircraft, and for agitation from

radio loudspeakers, which were conducted by special propaganda officers, urging those surrounded to surrender. German soldiers were frightened by the fact that if they were seriously wounded, then by order of Hitler they would certainly have to be shot. The author of this "duck" did not even pay attention to the fact that there is an obvious nonsense in the text of the interrogation protocol. Razofficers shot down seriously wounded soldiers, which means seriously wounded

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officers were still not shot. But the doctor allegedly declared that during the 14 days of fighting, not a single seriously wounded man was admitted to the infirmary. Surely, in 14 days of fierce fighting, not a single officer of the Viking was seriously wounded? In fact, the seriously wounded were evacuated by aircraft, while the lightly wounded, who could still move independently, were left in the "cauldron". After the planes could no longer land, and the remnants of the encircled group made a breakthrough, the infirmaries with the seriously wounded, along with medical personnel, were left at the mercy of the winners. I suspect that few of them survived in Soviet captivity, and not all of them lived to see it. Here, in advance, a legend was invented that the Germans, on the orders of Hitler, were shooting the seriously wounded. And it is quite suitable for the decomposition of the enemy's army, and it will do to justify why the seriously wounded who were in Soviet captivity did not survive. There were, they say, seriously wounded German soldiers. The officers just shot them.

Historian Wolfgang Akunov, based on the data of German memoirists, writes: "Under Shenderovka, the German units trying to break out of the "cauldron" found themselves in a truly desperate situation. Having punched a narrow gap in the enemy lines, they could not widen it in any way. There was almost no equipment left on the move, there was nothing to take out the wounded. Shenderovka turned into a huge infirmary for 4,000 wounded. A successful counterattack by a small panzer group of the Viking division succeeded in pushing the enemy back at least for a short time and getting a short respite. But the offensive of the Red Army units developed uncontrollably and unceasingly. And less than an hour passed, as the Viking tanks, which tried in vain to stop the red wave, were destroyed along with their crews (not a single person survived), the Anemians were driven out of Shenderovka.

Shenderovka also witnessed the dramatic scenes that took place during the attempt to evacuate the most seriously wounded "Vikings". They were loaded directly on stretchers onto the few tracked vehicles that were still in motion. But there were not enough cars for all the wounded. Then the wounded, taken out of the dressing station, began to be loaded onto

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peasant wagons, not forgetting to mark them as sanitary, with the flags of the Red Cross. However, the Red Cross flags did not stop the wave of 15 Soviet T-34 tanks. They indiscriminately shot both armored vehicles and tanks, as well as ambulances of the "Vikings". To the west of Shenderovka another group of Soviet tanks attacked the transport column of the sanitary company of the Viking division with the same result. In this massacre, as well as near Shenderovka, no more than a dozen "lucky ones" also survived. Those who survived had to walk on muddy roads, which became so impassable that even the few vehicles that the Vikings still had had to be abandoned, because they were of no use anyway.

It must be said that the enemy mass media stubbornly spread rumors discrediting the honor of the "Vikings" that they allegedly killed their wounded themselves. So, a certain Soviet officer, Major Kampov, who allegedly participated in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi operation, allegedly told the English journalist Alexander Vert, author of the book "Russia in the War", that the encircled "green SS men" allegedly killed all their wounded, "which undoubtedly contributed to the atmosphere of hysteria that marked their last night in Shenderovka. The order to kill the wounded was carried out very strictly. They not only shot...

their wounded - in the way they usually shot Russians and Jews - in the back of the head - no, they ... also set fire to ambulances ... What could be more terrible than the sight that met our eyes when we opened these charred vans - us? They were all full of charred skeletons with plaster casts around their arms or legs that were too big for them. After all, gypsum does not burn ... "

Thus, the legend about the killing of the wounded by the Viking SS men is a typical wartime propaganda. Especially since the method of shooting point-blank in the back of the head is a typical method used by the NKVD, but by no means by the German Sonderkommandos, who shot Jews and other "undesirable elements" from a distance, in groups at once and not in the back of the head.

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|| - Sokolov

Here I also note that it is unfair to accuse our tankers of shooting at carts with the wounded, regardless of the flags of the Red Cross. Who could see these flags in the heat of battle, and even at night, and even in a snowstorm! Let us recall the story of A. A. Vetrov, quoted in the previous chapters, about the breakthrough of the 15th Panzer Corps from the encirclement near Kharkov in March 1943. There, too, German tankers in the dark fired at the breaking through Soviet column, completely unaware of which vehicles were armed fighters and which were seriously wounded, and the healthy and the wounded were sitting, most often interspersed, who managed to settle down where. And Vetrov does not blame the Germans for this. But exactly the same picture was with the breakthrough of Stemmermann's group from the Cherkasy "KOTL".

Both during the war and after it, disputes did not subside over how many people the encircled group consisted of and how many of them were able to break through to their own. Stalin's order dated February 18, 1944, following the results of the Korsun-Shevchenkovsky operation, stated: "During this operation, the Germans left 52 thousand people killed on the battlefield. 11 thousand German soldiers and officers surrendered. All the equipment and weapons available to the enemy have been captured by our troops."

Subsequently, the number of prisoners increased to 18,200, and the number of those killed - up to 55,000. However, it is precisely the number of 11 thousand prisoners, and only in relation to the encircled grouping, that is in good agreement with archival data, according to which in the period from January 1 to | On March 1944, the Red Army captured only 15,351 enemy soldiers and officers on all fronts. With this in mind, the figure in || thousand prisoners from the actual Korsun-Shevchenko group seems to be quite accurate. The figure of 18,200 people, most likely, arose due to double counting in combat reports, when different units and formations chalked up the same prisoners.

The official Soviet figures on the results of the operation are as follows. Of the 80,000 Germans surrounded in the Korsun Shevchenkovsky "cauldron", 18,200 people were captured, killed and

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52,000 people were wounded, weapons and military equipment were captured and destroyed: 271 tanks, 110 assault guns, 32 armored vehicles (most likely armored personnel carriers), 994 guns, 536 mortars, 1,689 machine guns. According to Soviet estimates, 2-3 thousand wounded were evacuated by aircraft, and another 8-9 thousand people managed to break through the encirclement.

There is a clear discrepancy between the numbers here. It turns out that almost all the prisoners were the wounded, who, obviously, were still more than those killed. But if in more than two weeks of fighting there were only 2-3 thousand wounded in the encirclement who needed to be evacuated, then why did the number of wounded turn out to be an order of magnitude higher in the last three days of fighting?

With regard to the destroyed and captured military equipment, it can be assumed that, as in the case of prisoners, there is a double count. If these figures refer only to the encircled troops, then they, no doubt, were greatly exaggerated. At Korsun-

The Shevchenko group had only Viking tanks, and there were no more than 120 of them, and together with assault guns - two hundred and a half. It should also be noted that several dozen armored vehicles still managed to escape from the "cauldron". Most likely, data on enemy losses were taken from the reports of units, formations and armies, where there were both double counts and deliberate exaggeration of the damage inflicted on the enemy. After all, it was necessary to destroy approximately as many zhetanki as they had previously counted intelligence, and she often exaggerated the number of German armored vehicles.

It is also clear that both Konev and Zhukov, in their memoirs, tried in every possible way to underestimate the number of German soldiers and officers who managed to break out of the Korsun "boiler". After all, both of them were responsible for preventing a breakthrough. According to Konev, not one German tank or soldier passed through the four defensive lines of the inner and outer fronts of the encirclement. As the former commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, I.S. Konev, wrote in his memoirs, Gille and other generals who got out of the encirclement flew out of the "boiler" on planes, and did not break through with

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fighting through Soviet positions. At the same time, the marshal did not take into account that neither Gille nor anyone else, in principle, could fly out of the encirclement area before the last breakthrough, since starting from February 14, not a single plane could land in the "cauldron". Gille, on the other hand, broke through with his division and, according to eyewitnesses, personally led the crossing of the remnants of the division to wade through the last water barrier - the Rotten Tikach River. And Konev also testifies that "None of the reports and reports said that the Germans passed through any point or line of our troops, occupying defense both on the external and on the internal fronts." But what Soviet commander of a division or corps would dare to report to a higher commander that the encircled enemy had broken through the battle formations of his units! It turns out that the general did not complete his combat mission, and instead of an order and a new star on his shoulder straps, he may receive, if not a tribunal, then a reprimand.

Zhukov, on the contrary, believed that "only a few tanks and armored personnel carriers with generals, officers and SS men managed to escape from the encirclement and slip from the area of the village of Pochapintsy to the area of Lisyanka." Later, Soviet and Russian historians came to the conclusion that no less than 8-9 thousand people were able to leave on these tanks and armored personnel carriers. This is how many units of armored vehicles should have escaped from the "cauldron" then! If we assume that a maximum of 10-12 people could ride on one tank or armored personnel carrier, then it turns out that about 900 armored vehicles should have been surrounded. And this is several times more than the encircled people had, even according to the most daring reports of Soviet intelligence. I think that it is no longer necessary to prove the absurdity of the figures appearing in Soviet reports and marshal's memoirs. In recent years, some Russian historians are already talking about 20,000 people who escaped from the Korsun-Shevchenkivsky "boiler". Well, for the removal of such a horde on the armor, I think, all the armored vehicles that the Germans had at that moment on the Eastern Front would not have been enough. The losses of 70,000 killed, wounded and captured were now attributed not only to the encircled grouping, but also to the troops operating on the outer front of the encirclement.

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zheniya. As we shall see further on, this figure is considerably exaggerated.

Let us now turn to the German testimonies about the Korsun-Shevchenkivsky (Cherkasy) battle. Manstein states in his memoirs: "The First Tank Army received an order to complete the defeat of the units of the Soviet 1st Tank Army encircled on its left flank as soon as possible. 3 shopping mall should be released from this section as soon as possible. Together with the 16th, 17th TD, the Leibstandarte and the regiment of heavy tanks under the command of Veke, who especially distinguished himself in the last battle, he had to be transferred to the area where the crisis was now emerging, the 1st Panzer Division at the first opportunity was to follow them.

The 8th Army was tasked with removing 3 TD 47 TK from the sector it occupied and concentrating it at the breakthrough site. From the 6th Army, it was ordered to allocate another 24 TD to strengthen this grouping. However, when the latter arrived there, Hitler ordered that it be returned to Army Group A, as the situation in the Nikopol bridgehead was becoming threatening. She went there, however, too LATE.

By order of the command of the army group, both corps were to strike at the enemy forces that surrounded 42 and [1 ak, to the flank and rear: the corps of the 1st tank army from the west, the corps of the 8th army from the south.

The command of the army group concentrated a relatively large number of divisions in order to release the encircled corps. This was necessary, since the enemy threw into this area from the northwestern and eastern directions no more and no less than twenty-six rifle divisions and seven or eight tank, mechanized and cavalry corps. The use of such a large number of divisions is explained by the fact that, with the exception of fresh and replenished formations, Soviet divisions were incomplete. The task of our two strike groups was to cut the rear communications of the large number of formations accumulated here and then destroy them with concentric attacks.

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fighting through Soviet positions. At the same time, the marshal did not take into account that neither Gille nor anyone else, in principle, could fly out of the encirclement area before the last breakthrough, since starting from February 14, not a single aircraft could land in the "cauldron". Gille, on the other hand, broke through with his division and, according to eyewitnesses, personally led the crossing of the remnants of the division to wade through the last water barrier - the Rotten Tikach River. And Konev also testifies that "not a single report or report said that the Germans passed through any point or line of our troops occupying defense both on the external and on the internal fronts." But what Soviet commander of a division or corps would dare to report to a higher commander that the encircled enemy had broken through the battle formations of his units! It turns out that the general did not complete his combat mission, and instead of an order and a new star on his shoulder straps, he may receive, if not a tribunal, then a reprimand.

Zhukov, on the contrary, believed that "only a few tanks and armored personnel carriers with generals, officers and SS men managed to escape from the encirclement and slip from the area of the village of Pochapintsy to the area of Lisyanika." Later, Soviet and Russian historians came to the conclusion that no less than 8-9 thousand people were able to leave on these tanks and armored personnel carriers. This is how many units of armored vehicles should have escaped from the "cauldron" then! If we assume that a maximum of 10-12 people could ride on one tank or armored personnel carrier, then it turns out that about 900 armored vehicles should have left the encirclement. And this is several times more than the encircled people had, even according to the most daring reports of Soviet intelligence. I think that it is no longer necessary to prove the absurdity of the figures appearing in Soviet reports and marshal's memoirs. In recent years, some Russian historians are already talking about 20,000 people who escaped from the Korsun-Shevchenkovsky "boiler". Well, for the removal of such a horde on the armor, I think, all the armored vehicles that the Germans had at that moment on the Eastern Front would not have been enough. The losses of 70,000 killed, wounded, and prisoners were now attributed not only to the encircled grouping, but also to the troops operating on the outer front of the encirclement.

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Unfortunately, at first, deep snow, and then the onset of mud, significantly slowed down the concentration of both shock groups. Nevertheless, they managed to strike, as a result of which a significant part of the forces surrounding the Cherkassy group was defeated. Over 700 tanks, over 600 anti-tank guns and about 150 guns were destroyed, but both corps captured only 2,000 prisoners.

This was a sign that the enemy formations mainly consisted of motorized units. In the end, impassable mud and snow forced us to stop (I think that the resistance of the Soviet troops played an important role here. - RB.S.). The shock wedge Ztk approached 13 km to the southwestern side of the "boiler", 47 mk managed to pull back a significant part of the enemy forces ... "

The significance of the attacks of the relief groupings was that, although they failed to break through the encirclement from the outside, the Leibstandarte and other tank divisions inflicted heavy losses on Soviet tank and mechanized formations and significantly reduced their ability to counteract the German troops breaking through the encirclement.

Manstein continued: "Since there was no longer any hope that our tanks would reach the pocket, I ordered both encircled corps to break through to the southwest. During this time, as a result of renewed enemy attacks from all sides, both corps crowded into a small area that stretched from north to south for 45 km, and from west to east only for 15-20 km. Thus, we had to act if we still wanted to save these corps. On February 4, the Soviets already demanded that they surrender (in fact, the ultimatum, as we remember, was presented to the encircled only on February 8. - B.S.) ...

On the night of February 16-17, both corps, under the leadership of their commanders Stemmerman and Lieb, made an attempt to break out of the encirclement in a south-western direction, towards the 3rd Corps, which strained all its strength in order, despite the impenetrable mud, to throw towards breaking through

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a grouping of at least a few tanks. By order of the command of the army group, both encircled corps were to use the entire

artillery and available ammunition. Since during the exit from the encirclement the troops would have to move through impassability and deep mud, it was ordered to abandon the guns after all the ammunition was shot. The rear guards with several guns covered the troops of the enemy attacks coming out of the encirclement from the north, east and south.

One can imagine with what feelings, hoping and worrying, we waited on our staff train for news of whether the exit from the encirclement had succeeded. On the night of 16 to 17 February at [H. 25 min. Joyful news came that the first connection between the encircling corps and the forward units of the 3rd shopping mall had been established. The enemy, who was between them, was literally crushed. On February 28, we learned that 30,000-32,000 people came out of the "cauldron". As it contained six divisions and one brigade, given the low troop strength, this accounted for the majority of the active bayonets. It caused us great pain that most of the seriously wounded who were leaving the encirclement could not take with them. General Stemmermann died during the battle.

Thus, we managed to save these two corps from the fate that befell the 6th Army at Stalingrad. Here, too, Hitler first gave the order to continue the fight in the "cauldron", but then retroactively approved the order of the army group to prepare for the exit from the encirclement. The order to leave the encirclement itself was given by the command of the group without prior agreement with Hitler in order to exclude the possibility of objections from his side.

Of course, when leaving the encirclement, most of the heavy weapons and guns got stuck in the mud. Only a few of them, at the cost of incredible efforts, the troops managed to take with them. The divisions that escaped from the "cauldron" had to be temporarily withdrawn to the rear. As a result, six and a half divisions of the army group did not take part in the battles, which further complicated the situation. However, this could not overshadow the joy

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the joy that the successful rescue of at least the personnel of both corps brought us.

According to Manstein, 54 thousand people were on allowance in 6 encircled divisions and one brigade, as well as in two corps directorates, but part of the rear units did not fall into ring.

General Kurt Toppelskirch, in his History of the Second World War, published before Manstein's memoirs and therefore independent of Manstein's evidence, stated: and thus as a result of the irrational stubbornness of Hitler, who invariably ordered "not to withdraw troops from the unattacked sectors of the front; in order to deprive the enemy of freedom of action", two German corps ended up in a "cauldron". As always in such cases, the surrounded divisions had to be supplied by air, hastily transferring Yu-52 transport aircraft here; many of these aircraft were easily shot down by Russian fighter aircraft due to insufficient fighter cover. Due to the exposure of other sectors of the front, tank divisions were allocated, although with great difficulty, four each from the 8th field and 1st tank armies, which received the task of destroying the enemy forces that had broken through with concentric strikes and freeing the surrounded troops. The offensive, scheduled for February 3, unexpectedly ran into serious difficulties. The mudslide that began too early in the south of Russia delayed the concentration of the necessary forces. In addition, complications in other areas made it necessary to throw there part of the divisions intended for the counterattack. The divisions of the 1st Panzer Army, allocated for attacking from the south with the main forces, were able to go on the offensive only on February 4, and the attack from the north-west by the forces of the 8th Army followed only on February 11. These counterattacks turned out to be scattered and, despite an array of initial successes, they did not reach their goals. Meanwhile, the ring around the encircled corps was shrinking ever closer: the Russian bomber aircraft continuously inflicted

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powerful blows followed them, and, finally, the encircled grouping turned out to be so compressed around Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi that it lost the last airfields through which it was supplied. When by February 15 the offensive force of the deblocking troops was exhausted, the district corps received an order to break through in a southerly direction, where the tank corps of the 1st Tank Army was supposed to advance towards them. The brilliantly prepared breakthrough on the night of February 16-17, however, did not lead to a connection with the advancing corps, since the advance of the latter, already slow due to the poor condition of the ground, was stopped by the enemy. After that, the encircled corps had to, abandoning all heavy weapons, artillery and a large amount of equipment, make their way to their troops with the last desperate throw. Only 30,000 people came out of the encirclement."

Another German general, Friedrich Wilhelm Mellenthin, recalled: "... our 8th Army held a very dangerous ledge, which included Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi and reached the Dnieper; Hitler strongly insisted on holding this salient. The result of this decision was a new Stalingrad, although the scale of the catastrophe this time was less. The troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Marshal Vatutin, and the 2nd Ukrainian Front, Marshal Konev, broke through our defenses on both sides of Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi and surrounded over 50,000 German troops. With great difficulty, Manstein managed to get about 35,000 people out of the "cauldron", but the losses, especially in artillery, were huge. Most of the guns had to be abandoned on the roads."

Consequently, the number of German generals who escaped from the Cherkassy "cauldron" is estimated at 30-35 thousand. It is possible that Mellenthin simply added to the maximum number of those who broke through, given by Manstein, about 3,000 more wounded, evacuated by air, and thus received a figure of 35,000 survivors. The correctness of the Manstein data can be verified as follows. It is known that 4.5 thousand Viking soldiers and officers and 632

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soldiers of the Walloon Brigade. Among the latter, by the way, was also the future head of the Russian Imperial Union-Order in Argentina, Nikolai Ivanovich Sakhnovsky, and several other Russian emigrants who lived in Belgium and joined the Walloon legion. Together, these two formations can be equated to one and a half divisions. The total number of those encircled can be equated to 7 divisions (assuming the number of encircled units of corps subordination equal to half the average number of divisions at the time of encirclement). If we assume that approximately the same proportion of military personnel as in the Viking and Wallonia broke out of the encirclement in other divisions, then the total number of survivors can be estimated at 23,949 people. However, given that the Viking and Wallonia were the main striking force of the breakthrough, their losses should have been significantly greater than the losses of other formations. As noted later in the report on the breakthrough from the Cherkassy encirclement, "the brave grenadiers of the Germania regiment, using melee weapons, knocked out 24 Soviet tanks and prepared a breakthrough from the "boiler" in fierce close combat. We will take the minimum of Manstein's figures of 30,000 who broke through and add to them 3,000 wounded evacuated by air. Then the irretrievable losses in the "cauldron" should have been about 21 thousand people - 1] thousand prisoners and 10 thousand dead. If we add to this another 3,000 wounded who were evacuated earlier, and assume that among those who broke through there were also at least 3,000 wounded, the total losses of the encircled group can be estimated at 27,000 people. The strength of the deblocking group was approximately twice the size of the encircled group, therefore, its loss of wounded requiring evacuation in the period from January 28 to February 14 can be estimated at 6,000 people. On February 14-17, when the fighting was even more fierce, the deblocking group could lose at least 3 thousand people wounded. There were almost no prisoners from the deblocking troops, and the proportion of those killed was significantly less than among the encircled, who had to make a breakthrough, regardless of losses. Can

to assume that the number of dead among the deblocking troops was half the number of wounded. Then the losses of German troops on the outer front of the encirclement can be estimated at 4.5 thousand killed, and the total losses - at 13.5 thousand people. The total German losses of the Germans during the Korsun Shevchenko encirclement from January 28 to February 17 inclusive are estimated by us at 40.5 thousand people, and the losses of all these troops in the period before the encirclement, from January 24 to 27, are estimated by us at 4.5 thousand killed and wounded. In total, all the losses of the Germans during the Korsun-Shevchenkivsky battle can be estimated at 45 thousand people, including 11 thousand prisoners and at least 16 thousand killed. This is much less than the official Russian historians' estimate of these losses at 70,000 killed, wounded and captured.

Data on Soviet casualties are much more scarce and unreliable. According to official, significantly underestimated data, as we have already seen from the example of the Battle of Kursk, the 1st Ukrainian Front irrevocably lost 124,467 people in the period from December 24, 1943 to April 17, 1944. Its sanitary losses during this time reached 331,902 people. During the same period, the 2nd Ukrainian Front lost 66,059 killed and missing and 200,914 wounded. It can be assumed that the irretrievable losses of the fronts were underestimated by at least half and in reality amounted to about 229 thousand and about 132 thousand, respectively. - January 13, 1944), Korsun-Shevchenkivsky operation (from January 24 to February 17, 1944), Rivne-Lutsk (January 27 - February 11) and Proskurovo-Chernivtsi operation (from March 4 to April 17, 1944). During the same period, the 2nd Ukrainian Front carried out the Kirovograd operation (January 5-16, 1944), the Korsun-Shevchenko operation, the Proskurov-Chernivtsi operation and the Uman-Botoshansk operation (from March 5 to April 17). 1944). Purely conditionally, we can assume that the level of losses did not differ too much from the average daily for a given period. For the 1st Ukrainian Front during this period, hostilities lasted 89 days. Sledova

Thus, the average daily irretrievable losses could amount to 2.57 thousand people, and sanitary - 3.73 thousand people. It should also be taken into account that the Rovno-Lutsk operation was carried out in parallel with the Korsun-Shevchenkivsky operation, which, however, was 9 days shorter, and if we take into account that the 1st Ukrainian Front began the Korsun-Shevchenkivsky operation on January 26, then 7 days shorter. In the Korsun-Shevchenkivsky operation, two combined arms and one tank armies of the 1st Ukrainian Front took part. Taking all this into account, it can be assumed that in the period from January 27 to February 11, i.e. within 16 days, 55.6% of the daily losses of the 1st Ukrainian Front fell on the Korsun-Shevchenko operation. Thus, only within 7 days all the losses of the 1st Ukrainian Front fell on this operation. Accordingly, the irretrievable losses of the 1st Ukrainian Front during the entrance of the Korsun-Shevchenko operation could reach 40.9 thousand people, and during the Proskurovo-Chernivtsi operation - 115.7 thousand people. The sanitary losses of the front, respectively, could reach 59.3 thousand people in the first of the operations, and 167.9 thousand people in the second.

For the 2nd Ukrainian Front, hostilities lasted 82 days during this period. The average daily irretrievable losses of the front could reach 1.61 thousand people, and sanitary - 2.45 thousand people. Accordingly, during the Korsun-Shevchenko operation, the 2nd Ukrainian Front lost 40.3 thousand people killed and missing and 61.3 thousand people wounded. It is much more difficult to determine the losses of the 2nd Ukrainian Front during the Proskurov-Chernovitsky operation, since the front also carried out the Uman-Botoshansky operation in parallel with it. Five combined arms and three tank armies participated in this operation. The 2nd Ukrainian Front participated in the Proskurov-Chernivtsi operation with only one combined arms army. Taking into account the fact that the tank army was at least twice as large as the combined arms army, the 40th Army of the 2nd Ukrainian Front during the Proskurov-Chernivtsi operation should have accounted for no more than 13.3% of the front's losses during this period. Given this loss

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The 2nd Ukrainian Front in this operation could have been 9.6 thousand killed and missing and 14.7 thousand wounded.

Thus, the losses of Soviet troops in the Korsun-Shevchenko operation amounted to about 81.2 thousand killed and missing and about 120.6 thousand wounded. In the Proskurov-Chernivtsi operation, Soviet irretrievable losses amounted to about 125.3 thousand people, and sanitary - about 182.6 thousand people.

The total Soviet losses during the Korsun-Shevchenko operation, according to our estimates, are 4.5 times greater than the German ones. For irretrievable losses, this ratio is 3.0 times, and for the wounded - 6.7 times.

According to the American historian David Glantz, during the Korsun-Shevchenko operation, the Soviet troops lost 24,286 people killed and 55,902 wounded. This estimate seems to us to be underestimated, also because prisoners are not taken into account here. After all, according to Manstein, during the Korsun-Shevchenko operation, the Germans captured about 7,000 prisoners. If only the dead are taken into account, then the ratio will be 4.6:1 in favor of the Germans.

It is more difficult to estimate German losses in the Proskurov-Chernivtsi operation. Here we only have data on the monthly irretrievable losses of the German ground forces (including the losses of the SS troops) in [944. In January they amounted to 66,500 people, in February - 60,744, in March - 72,200 and in April - 47,000. - ny losses. It should be taken into account that at that time the German army was also fighting in Italy, where the average monthly irretrievable losses from July 1943 to the end of November 1944 amounted to 3.9 thousand people. If we subtract them from the losses of March and April, then about 111.4 thousand dead and missing will fall on the Eastern Front during this period. These losses were incurred during the Proskurovsko-Chernovitskaya, Umansko-Botoshanskaya, Bereznegovato-Snigirevskaya (March 6-18), Tyrgu-Frumoskaya (April 8-May 6), Crimean (April 8

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relay - May 12), Vitebsk (February 2 - March 13) and Pskov (March 9 - April 1) operations of the Red Army. In all these operations, except for the first four, the Soviet troops, according to official data (without the doubling of irretrievable losses accepted by us), suffered in March and April total losses of approximately 234 thousand people. In the Uman-Botoshansk operation, the 2nd Ukrainian Front, if we take only official data, should have lost about 124.3 thousand people. It can be assumed that in the Bereznegovovato Snigirevskaya and Tyrgu-Frumoskaya operations, which were much smaller in scope, directed to someone mainly against the Romanian troops, in battles with the German troops, the Soviet troops suffered losses in the amount of no more than one third of those that they suffered in the Uman-Botoshansk operation, i.e. about 40 thousand people. Official data on Soviet losses in the Proskurov-Chernivtsi operation can be estimated at 245,000 people.

Then the total Soviet official losses in March-April 1944 can be estimated at 643 thousand people, of which about 38% fall on the Proskurov-Chernivtsi operation. It can be assumed that, in turn, in the German irretrievable losses on the Eastern Front, this operation accounts for approximately the same share. It will be about 42.3 thousand people. In this case, the ratio of deadweight losses, taking into account our estimate of Soviet deadweight losses, will be approximately 3.0:1 in favor of the Germans and will be exactly the same as in the case of the Korsun-Shevchenko battle.

After a breakthrough from the Cherkassy "cauldron" "Viking" and "Wallonia" were sent from the front to reform. The Narva battalion was withdrawn from the Viking. But it was not possible to complete the reformation. In March, the Viking was transferred to the Kovel region to repel the Soviet offensive.

The history of the military operations of the Viking near Kovel and later in the Kleschely region in Polysh received a curious refraction in Soviet literature, and then in cinematography. In 2003, for the May holidays on two programs

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Simultaneously they showed the new Russian blockbuster Zvezda directed by Nikolai Lebedev based on the novel of the same name by Emmanuil Kazakevich, written in 1946, and Mikhail Ptashuk's film In August 1944. The first one is designed to outshine the American bestseller Saving Private Ryan, although it falls far short of it in terms of special effects and the scale of the production. The second one is pleasant to watch more than once because of the brilliant game of Yevgeny Mironov and Alexander Baluev, when the Neman group is "pumped on indirect". And few people know that both Kazakevich's "Star" and Bogomolov's "Moment of Truth" have a very specific documentary basis, only both writers, in accordance with their ideological tasks, introduced a conscious distortion into the chronology of events and combined each two military operations, actually carried out at different times.

The film Zvezda by Nikolai Lebedev is technically far superior to the modest film adaptation of Kazakevich's story, made back in 1949 by Alexander Ivanov, but released on the screen only in 1953, after the death of the generalissimo. Nikolai Kryuchkov recalled: "In this film, Stalin did not like that my hero, Sergeant Mamochkin, before blowing himself up, says "That's it," and not "For Stalin." And the picture was banned..." Lebedev's film, on the contrary, judging by the hype raised on the eve of the premiere, will have a happy fate at the box office. It seems that Lebedev's painting should become part of a new myth about the Great Victory won by the Russian people without Stalin and without the party. And the story of Kazakevich as a literary basis for this purpose fits perfectly. There are no political officers here, and the heroes never mention the name of Stalin. The mention of a specific enemy division - the Viking SS Panzer Division, which is the main target of Lieutenant Travkin's reconnaissance group, gave readers the impression that they were dealing with an almost documentary story, that everything was in reality. Surely the audience of the new film will have exactly the same impression.

In fact, Kazakevich's story "The Star", although it is really based on real events, is presented

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is a heroic myth. As is often the case in the history of the Great Patriotic War, in fact, everything happened exactly the opposite.

Major Emmanuil Kazakevich, despite the strong myopia that guaranteed him a white ticket, during the war years was the commander of a reconnaissance company, then - the head of intelligence of the division and assistant to the head of intelligence of the army, became a holder of 8 military orders and medals. And he based the story on real events: two counterattacks that were inflicted by the SS Viking division near Kovel and in Poland, in the Kleschely region, in July 1944 against the troops of the 65th Army. Only in contrast to the way it is presented by Kazakevich, both counterattacks turned out to be a) successful and b) completely unexpected for the Soviet command.

The sudden attack of the 2nd Byelorussian Front on the Kovel direction caused serious concern among the German command. After all, there was a real threat of Soviet troops entering the deep rear of Army Group Center. I had to take urgent action. All formations of the German 4th Panzer Army of the Army Group "Center" operating against the 2nd Belorussian Front were transferred to the 2nd Army of the same army group. Up to 8 divisions, including one tank division, were regrouped at the junction of Army Groups South and Center from the reserve of Army Group Center and from other sectors of the front. Since the end of March, stubborn battles began in the Kovel direction. On April 4, the Germans managed to break through to Kovel and unblock the encircled garrison. Under the blows of superior enemy forces, the 70th Soviet Army was also forced to retreat. On April 5, due to a lack of forces, the 2nd Belorussian Front stopped

offensive. On the same day, a directive from the Stavka on its disbandment followed. This is how you can briefly characterize the course of the battle near Kovel, in which the Viking happened to play an important role.

Kazakevich dates the scene of his story to the Kovel region, and the time is the spring of 1944. He writes: "Under the command of the Gruppenführer (Lieutenant General of the SS troops) Herbert Gille, the division as part of the 9th Motorized Regiment" West

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land", 10th motorized regiment "Germany", 5th tank regiment, 5th self-propelled artillery battalion and 5th field artillery regiment, in all the splendor of their first-class equipment, secretly concentrated in these huge forests, with in order to unblock the city of Kovel, surrounded by Russians, with an unexpected blow, to divide the Russians into isolated groups and, destroying them, throw them back to the border of two famous rivers - Stokhod and Styr.

Recently, the division, with its usual ferocity, has pacified the recalcitrant Yugoslavia.

Having received a strong reinforcement in men and sixty tanks of the NEW TYPE "Tiger", which Herr Reichsminister Speer referred to as the "King of Tanks", the division numbered fifteen thousand people. The regiments were commanded by Standartenführer Müllenkamp, who was repeatedly marked by the Führer, Standartenführer Gargeis, Hitler's former personal adjutant, and other Himmlerian wolves, high on the ladder of the National Socialist and military hierarchy, successful and ruthless intriguers.

Following the Viking division, the elite, although not so brilliant 342nd Grenadier Division, under the command of Lieutenant General Nickel, was preparing for the arrival from France to this sector of the front. She had to develop the success of the SS.

The whole operation was carried out in deep secrecy.

"The Russians broke too close to the Governor General," his patron von dem Bach, the commander of the SS corps, told Gruppenführer Gille, who received him at his mansion on the island of Ifauen-insel near Berlin. — You understand the consequences, Party Genosse Gille. This will mean the activation of all anti-German forces in Europe and, perhaps, can force the British and Americans to act ... The Führer attaches paramount importance to your operation.

The main apartment is interested in the deep secrecy of this regrouping. Observe all precautions.

Now, having concentrated his division in the gloomy forests west of the city of Kovel, Gille awaited further orders.

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zhenii, full of confidence in the success of the operation entrusted to him."

The reader gets the full impression that a group of scouts is opposed by a fresh division, replenished with the latest armored vehicles. In reality, everything was just the opposite. The "Viking" division had just broken out of the Korsun-Shevchenko "boiler" at the end of February, having suffered heavy losses, especially in armored vehicles. The Viking, together with the SS Wallonia brigade, were the shock units of the group that broke out of the encirclement, and suffered particularly heavy losses. The former commander of the "Wallonia" Leon Degrel recalled: "A year later (after Stalingrad. - B.S.), the SS divisions" Viking "and" Wallonia "were surrounded in a similar way near Cherkassy. The Stalingrad catastrophe was still fresh in the memory of our soldiers, and they could easily succumb to demoralization. To top it all off, I was lying with a deep lateral wound and a temperature of 39 degrees. As commander of the SS Walloon Brigade, I knew that all this did not contribute to the high

to whom fighting spirit. I got up and for 17 days led attack after attack to break the blockade, participated in numerous hand-to-hand fights, was wounded four times, but never stopped fighting. All my soldiers did the same and more. The ring was broken through by the boundless SS courage and spirit. After the breakthrough from the encirclement, only 632 people remained in the Wallonia brigade, and it was withdrawn from the front for reorganization. The Viking division, which lost almost half of its personnel in the encirclement, had less than 4,000 people in service. In total, 4.5 thousand Viking soldiers and officers left the encirclement, but a significant part of them were wounded and could not participate in the battle for Kovel.

And the former Oberstgruppenführer and Colonel-General of the SS troops Paul Hausser wrote in his book "SS in Battle": "The remains of the Viking after their breakthrough from Cherkasy (as the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi "cauldron" is called in German historiography. — B.S. .) should have been reorganized after a breakthrough in the area east of Lublin - Krasnostov - Kholm

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Ma, the soldiers, especially the European volunteers, needed to be sent on leave. It took time to obtain heavy weapons, equipment and replenishment. In Germany, two divisions were being prepared for the coming reorganization. Of the weapons in total, the division had only 400 carbines and machine guns at its disposal.

On March 12, an order was issued by the Wehrmacht High Command to immediately reinforce the troops defending in Kovel with a combat group of approximately 4,000 men. About 4,000 people (SS cavalry regiment, militias, police formations with a small amount of artillery and light anti-aircraft guns) were then in these positions. The group commander was police general von dem Bach-Zelewski, commander of the "SS formations to combat gang formations." However, he did not meet the task assigned to him and at the same time announced that he was ill.

The order to form a battle group, given the state of the division at that time, was absolutely impossible. However, all objections were ignored. On March 16, the commander of the SS division "Viking" flew into the "cauldron" and took command of the Kovel group. The battle group of the commander of the 5th Panzer Regiment Richter, composed of various parts of the division, was to follow him by rail. However, she failed to break through.

The situation in the completely surrounded city was critical. Soviet troops attacked daily. Our defense was weak, the soldiers were inexperienced, without ammunition and anti-tank guns. At the same time, there was a particular shortage of medicines and dressing materials. The supply by air was costly. Since Kovel is located in a swampy area, there were very few basements to save.

There were no reinforcements. Hour by hour the situation worsened. It was only on March 30 that a group of 7 tanks of the SS division with 50 soldiers of the 131st Infantry Division managed to break through from the west. They were greeted with joy - it was a significant reinforcement.

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Meanwhile, on the outer front of the "cauldron" Richter, after the first unsuccessful attempt, gathered the remnants of the division in Kholm. The soldiers were sparsely armed, especially lacking heavy weapons, means of communication, equipment and field kitchens. All that remained was to transport them by rail. Several units provided cover for the railway bridge across the Bug to the east of Kholm.

After the 131st Infantry Division arrived, the Richter battle group became part of it. The railway, destroyed in many places by partisans, was rebuilt. The starting point for future attacks was Maseev Station. The road was completely swept away, besides, it was still mined. It was impossible to pass on it by motor transport, even tractors got stuck. The enemy moved further west, so that we could only hold the passage from the Bug to

East. Despite the constant unsuccessful attacks, the enemy became stronger day by day. A breakthrough still seemed impossible.

Finally, the shock group was reinforced by the 5th, and later - by the 4th Panzer Division of the Wehrmacht. Through the joint efforts of the 131st Infantry, 4th and 5th Panzer Divisions and the Richter Group, they finally managed to clear the road to Kovel and, at the railway junction west of Kovel, extend a helping hand to the brave defenders. First, all the wounded were taken out - almost 2,000 people. The commander of the KhSU tank corps, General Friedrich Hossbach, took command of the Kovel group. Until the end of the month, fighting continued, with the aim of increasing the narrow Kovel corridor and establishing supplies in full.

° Gille received diamonds for the Knight's Cross for courage and successful defense of Kovel. In addition to him, only Sepp Dietrich received this high award in the SS troops. For Viking, Cherkasy and Kovel became great pages of military glory. After them, the division was withdrawn to Lublin, and later sent to the Heidelager training camp.

Together with Gille, the division headquarters, a sapper battalion and a headquarters battery of 7 assault guns were transferred to Kovel. In total, in the division during the battles for Kovel, there were

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79 tanks and assault guns, which did not arrive at the same time and immediately joined the battle.

It is also worth pointing out that since March 27, 16 Panther tanks of the 8th company of the 5th regiment of the 5th SS Panzer division "Viking" and 22 T-[U] tanks of the 1st company took part in the battles for Kovel. In addition, the units of the division that were in the relief grouping were given a division of 10 assault guns. On March 28, the 8th company attacked, but failed to break through to Kovel. The report of the Viking headquarters dated March 28 described this battle as follows: "The 8th company of the 5th tank regiment was the first to come to Maseev. Its commander was a brave officer, a native of South Tyrol, SS Obersturmführer (Ober Lieutenant) Karl Nikolussi-Lek, who had established himself as a remarkable tank commander even in the battles in the Caucasus. His tank company was well prepared, fully armed with brand new 16 Panthers. They arrived just in time to support the advance on Kovel. It was to be carried out under the command of Colonel Naber, commander of the 434th regiment from the Stare-Kozary region along the Kholm-Kovel railway in the direction of Kovel. To do this, the tank company of Nikolussi-Leka had to advance directly on Cherkasy, break through the anti-tank line at a height to the west of this settlement and take Cherkasy. The motorized infantry battalion of the motorized infantry regiment "Germany" with ten assault guns under the command of SS-Sturmbannführer Haka was to support the attack, and the 1st battalion of the 434th regiment of Captain Bolm with seven assault guns was to attack in the direction of the northern part Cherkasy to secure the northern flank of the attackers.

At 12 o'clock the preparation was over, and it was possible to start the attack. Colonel Nabert handed over about 30 volunteers from his regiment to SS Obersturmführer Nikolussi-Leck, who boarded the Panthers to provide them with infantry cover.

At 2:30 pm, Nicolussi reported on the radio: "The company is standing at a height of 600 meters west of Cherkassy. Enemy positions

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broken through. Strong blizzard. First, we will clear the height from the enemy, then we will continue the attack.

At 16.30. "We are fighting for Cherkassy."

17.15. "Cherkasy has been taken, cleared of infantry. Seven anti-tank guns, four guns, 300 prisoners, eight tanks in service, three knocked out, five stuck in a swamp.

Meanwhile, the remaining enemy infantry left Cherkassy. About 1,000 men retreated to Mozhzhena, pursued by five tanks. But then, in order to continue the attack in the direction of Mozhzhena, as ordered, it was impossible to think. The snowstorm and the falling night, as well as the order of Colonel Naber, kept the battle group in Cherkassy. Having overcome three lines of anti-tank defense and defeated large enemy forces, Nikolussi-Lek did not want to lose his success. He spoke with Captain Bolm of the 434th Infantry Regiment, and they decided to use their success and, under cover of the predawn darkness, ignoring the order to stop, continue the attack on Kovel. In addition, military intelligence reported that they were opposed by a weak enemy. At 0400 they attacked again.

And here is how Karl Nikolussi-Lek himself later recalled this battle: "Kovel was declared a "defense knot". I was ordered to break through the Red forces into the city and help hold it until our troops managed to organize a counteroffensive and break through the encirclement. Due to the superiority of the enemy forces, the snowy and at the same time swampy terrain, the implementation of a breakthrough turned out to be a very difficult and time-consuming task. After ten hours of extremely slow progress, overcoming the constant resistance of the enemy, by midnight we had gone only half the way, having lost a third of our combat vehicles. In this situation, the plan to break into the city began to seem completely hopeless to me. When the vanguard of my tank column was separated from Kovel by only 2 kilometers, I received an order from my battalion commander to stop. True, by this time my lead tank had already got involved in the battle with the red

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mi, wedged into their line of defense in the northwestern suburbs of Kovel. Realizing the desperate situation we were in, I decided to disobey orders and continue the attack.

This time, nature itself helped us. Under the protection of a snow whirlwind and huge snowdrifts that covered us on the left flank, after an 18-hour battle, having lost half of our combat vehicles, we finally reached the city at dawn. Then we defended Kovel for a long time from counterattacks of superior enemy forces, until the attack of one of the German tank corps broke through the enemy encirclement, which made it possible to bring reinforcements into Kovel and evacuate our wounded from there. And while we were fighting inside the city, the Luftwaffe supplied us with food, medicines, ammunition and fuel by air, dropping everything we needed in containers. True, at the same time, some of the containers fell into the hands of the Reds - but here we are already couldn't do anything...

After several attempts to defeat the enemy units defending the northeastern quarters of Kovel, I returned to the Gille command post with several tanks and reported the situation to the Gruppenfuehrer.

Thus, during the second attack on March 29, seven tanks of the Nikolussi-Leka company managed to break through to Kovel, and one more tank was damaged. After that, 6 Panthers remained in the Deutschland tank regiment, which played a major role in the release of Kovel on April 5, as well as 22 T-U. There were no more tanks in it. All these "panthers" were new tanks, and not only a few that they managed to pull out of the Korsun "cauldron".

Incidentally, Carl Nikolussi-Lek is one of the few Viking veterans who was still alive in 2008. At the end of the war, he rose to the rank of Hauptsturmfuehrer, in March 1945 he received the Golden German Cross, avapre-. He surrendered to the Americans. Nicolussi-Lek, born in the Austrian town of Pfatten in South Tyrol in 1917, now grows roses in his garden and is engaged in garden design in Bozen, in his native South Tyrol.

As you can see, "Viking" by the time the fighting began near Kovel

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was by no means a full-blooded division, as Kazakevich wanted to portray him, who himself served in the intelligence of the 47th Army, who fought near Kovel. Instead of 15 thousand, Gille had less than 4 thousand soldiers, exhausted by the recent breakthrough from the Korsun encirclement. And only 22 T-[U] tanks and 16 Panthers, 7 of which made their way to Kovel. In addition, 17 assault guns - that's all the armored vehicles that the Viking had at that time. There is no talk of any 60 brand new "tigers". Yes, Kazakevich's statement about the "tigers" as tanks of a "new type" sounds strange. For the first time, "tigers" appeared on the Eastern Front in December 1942, throughout 1943 they actively participated in the battles, and by March 1944 could not be considered as a novelty. Perhaps the writer had in mind a newer type of tank, the so-called "royal tigers", which had thicker armor and a more armor-piercing gun than simple "tigers". Therefore, he quoted Speer's words about the "tiger" as the "king of tanks." However, for the first time, "royal tigers" appeared on the Eastern Front only in August 1944, and in March they could not have been near Kovel.

Gille, it turns out, did not at all lead the breakthrough to Kovel of his division, but led the defense of Kovel, being directly in the "cauldron". At that time, the Viking actually did not inflict any counterattack, and the division commander with seven tanks was in Kovel. And with General and Obergruppen SS Fuhrer Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, Gillies could talk at that time, not at all in a mansion near Berlin, but only in Kovel. And, of course, the commander of the Viking would never have allowed any patronizing tone towards himself from the general, who was clearly fleeing from the Kovel "cauldron" under the pretext of illness. Yes, Bach-Zelewski, who served in a completely different department, could not contribute to Gille's official career. And the battles near Kovel were eventually crowned with success for the Germans, since they managed to release the Kovel garrison.

And here is what General M.Kh. Kalashnik, the former head of the political department of the 47th Ar

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mission, in which E. M. Kazakevich served: "As a result of well-organized reconnaissance, the army headquarters, commanders and headquarters of formations by the beginning of the offensive had fairly accurate information about the opposing enemy forces. The grouping of Nazi troops in the offensive zone of the army consisted of units of the 213th German security division, the 17th SS police regiment, the 50th and 622nd sapper battalions, [2nd railway battalion and [0th a separate anti-aircraft artillery battalion. The troops were combined into a divisional group under the command of SS Obergruppenführer Bach. In the rear of the Kovel ledge, the 9th and 19th Hungarian light infantry divisions were located, guarding communications in the area of Kovel, Malorita, Kholm, Vladimir-Volynsky. As you can see, no Viking division is mentioned here. True, according to Kalashnik, the army commander, General V.S. I'll flatter you.

But according to Kalashnik, the battles for Kovel proceeded as follows: "... By the end of the day on March 18, the enemy garrison in Kovel was surrounded, and the rest of the enemy troops defending the Kovel ledge were pushed back 10–20 kilometers west of the city. From March 19 to March 29, the 60th, 175th and 260th rifle divisions fought intense battles directly behind Kovel. However, due to the extremely stubborn resistance of the German troops, who used for defense all the brick buildings, the system of pillboxes, bunkers, various reinforced concrete fortifications, for all these days our units managed to capture only two small streets. Getting to the city center proved to be very difficult.

On the outer front, on the line of Stara Vyzhma, Targovishte, other formations of the army were fighting just as intensely, repulsing almost continuous enemy counterattacks. The situation there became more difficult. The fascist German command threw more and more tanks into battle, and our anti-tank artillery units did not have enough

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lack of ammunition: due to impassability, spring flooding of rivers, creeks and swamps, the supply of shells was reduced to a minimum.

Later, from the testimonies of the captured German officers and the data of the captured staff papers, it will become known what great importance the German High Command attached to the defense of the Kovel region. Operational Order No. 7, signed by Hitler, will fall into our hands, in which the command of Army Group Center was charged with the duty to concentrate the main defensive efforts on a narrow sector of the front in the Brest region and emphasized that "the primary task of the Army Group" The center consists in recapturing Kovel and establishing contact with the troops of Army Group South. We will learn later that even before Hitler signed this order, the German fascist command, foreseeing a real threat of a breakthrough by Soviet troops from the Kovel region to the rear of Army Group Center, took urgent measures to strengthen the defense in this direction. In the second half of March and early April, the Germans transferred four infantry and three tank divisions, two assault artillery divisions and a separate tank battalion here from less dangerous sectors of the front.

All this will become known after the defeat of the Kovel grouping of the enemy ... We were all sure: it would take another day or two, five at most, and the encircled Kovel garrison would capitulate, the city would be taken.

Under the defeat of the Kovel grouping here, no doubt, we mean the liberation of Kovel by the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front on July 6, 1944. This means that during the March-April battles, the reconnaissance of the 47th Army had no idea about the composition of the grouping concentrated to de-blockade Kovel. Consequently, there was yet another miscalculation of intelligence, which gave rise to the army command's capricious mood, as if Kovel could be taken in a couple of days. Kalashnik also does not indicate that at least one of the three German tank divisions, the Viking, had only 38 tanks, and other divisions were far from fully equipped with equipment. Was not near Kovel and

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not a single tank battalion. Separate battalions were then equipped with Tiger tanks, and none of them operated near Kovel at that time.

Here is how Kalashnik describes further events:

"Some employees of the political agencies of the formations, using fragmentary information, even made hasty conclusions about the panic that allegedly reigned in the encircled German garrison in Kovel. For example, a report came from the 143rd Konotop-Korostensky Rifle Division that, according to information received from defectors, many German soldiers and even SS men from the encircled garrison "dress up in civilian clothes and hide in basements, in the attics, making their way into the forest and the nearest farms, waiting for the outcome of the Kovel operation.

In reality, however, the enemy's resistance did not weaken. Using strongholds and fortifications, the Nazis surrounded in the city, especially the SS, continued to defend every street, every alley, every house with desperate fanaticism. Despite the opposition of our aviation, German pilots from time to time managed to drop containers with ammunition and food into the city. Apparently, the encircled garrison still believed that the German troops operating on the outer front would certainly rescue them. And there, on the outer front, ten kilometers from Kovel, the Nazis almost continuously counterattacked our units. Enemy infantry counterattacks were supported by more and more

the number of tanks and aircraft.

Every day it became more obvious that the German fascist command was counting on prolonging the fighting in the Kovel area, and the troops encircled in the city were striving to keep

him, hoping for a speedy release of the garrison. Offers of surrender transmitted by us via radio installations remained unanswered.

In the meantime, it became known that the Germans had transferred several large military formations from other sectors of the front to the Kovel region, including the selected SS Viking Panzer Division. Intelligence captured by our troops

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A chik from this division testified that it had received the task, together with other units, of releasing the garrison encircled in Kovel, after which it was promised to be sent to Germany for reformation. The same prisoner of war praised in every possible way the abilities of the commander of the "Viking" division, 50-year-old SS Gruppenführer Gille, one of Himmler and Rosenberg's close associates.

The transfer of the Viking division and other selected infantry and tank units of the enemy to the Kovel area threatened us with new serious tests, especially since the Soviet regiments and divisions, both surrounding Kovel and fighting on the external front, suffered significant losses. .

Apparently, the command of the front was convinced of the need to strengthen the troops of our army. But the moment was lost. The enemy managed to concentrate a powerful armored fist on the outer front. A day or two after the head of the front's political department left the army, the Nazis launched a counterattack. At the cost of heavy losses, in the first days of April, they managed to break through from the area of Matsyuv, Tupala along the railway to Kovel and somewhat push our troops. Units and formations of the army entrenched themselves on the outskirts of the city, having the task of defending this area, accumulating strength and preparing for a new decisive assault.

It turns out that at the height of the battles for Kovel, Soviet intelligence did not know that Gille had been in Kovel for a long time and was directing the actions of the encircled garrison. He was, of course, no close associate of Himmler and Rosenberg. Yes, and it was tricky to be close to both at the same time, since the Reichsfuehrer SS and the Reichsminister of the Eastern Territories did not favor each other, in particular, because of the conflict over who should obey the police and police formations in the occupied Soviet territories. Due to the fact that Himmler's subordinates ignored Rosenberg's instructions to pursue a more flexible policy towards the local population, this conflict escalated even more. And it's completely incomprehensible what kind of elite SS unit this is, which must be urgently sent for reorganization. Neither the Kalashnik

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More than that, Kazakevich does not say anything about the fact that the Viking had recently escaped from the Korsun pocket and, even after the replenishment of military equipment, during the battles near Kovel had only 38 tanks, among which there was not a single "tiger".

Interestingly, even after the end of the April battles, until the start of the Soviet offensive in Belarus, the intelligence of the 47th Army continued to list the Viking division as part of the enemy grouping opposing the army until the start of the Soviet offensive in Belarus on June 23, although in May she was transferred to the training camp Heidelager in Poland for re-formation.

In his story, Kazakevich preferred to turn defeat into victory. Moreover, at one time, for the failure near Kovel, the command of the 47th Army and the 2nd Belorussian Front was hit hard. The commander of the neighboring 1st Belorussian Front, K.K. Rokossovsky, was sent to deal with them. True, he came to the conclusion that it was not expedient to conduct an operation to capture Kovel now, and suggested waiting until Operation Bagration was carried out. Nevertheless, before the start of this operation, which ended with the liberation of Belarus, the eastern part of Poland, Lithuania and Kovel, in April - May 1944, the commander of the 2nd Belorussian Front

General P. A. Kurochkin and Commander of the 47th Army V. S. Polenov lost their posts (the first was due to the disbandment of the 2nd Belorussian Front). They paid for the failure near Kovel.

By the way, the part of Kazakevich's story, which tells how the Soviet aircraft bombed the places of deployment of the Viking, identified by Travkin's group, was probably read by the veterans of that battle with a bitter smile. As the Russian military historian S. I. Mikhalev writes, the operation to capture Kovel "due to the weak combat strength of the 6th Air Army, the delay in its redeployment and adverse weather conditions was carried out with ineffective air support."

The Soviet side estimated the German losses in the battle for Kovel (it is usually referred to in Soviet sources as

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Polesky operation) with more than 10 thousand people killed and captured, up to 100 guns and mortars, 50 tanks, 36 aircraft. These data are undoubtedly greatly exaggerated. The losses of the 2nd Belorussian Front in the period from March 15 to April 5, 1944 amounted to 2761 killed and missing and 8371 wounded and sick. It is easy to see that the enemy losses in the reports are shown in such a way that the irretrievable losses of the Germans were approximately equal to the total Soviet losses. Soviet losses, especially irretrievable ones, are certainly underestimated.

In his story, the writer Kazakevich made the Viking what it became only by July 1944, when the division, replenished and re-equipped, returned to the front and really launched a counterattack, but not in the direction of Kovel, and in Eastern Poland. Then the division numbered more than 17 thousand people and had about 50 "panthers" and 40 tanks of other types (but not "tigers"), as well as 15 assault guns. And this counterattack, contrary to what is written in Zvezda, turned out to be completely unexpected for the Soviet troops and, by the time the Army Group Center was defeated, was relatively successful for the Germans.

Here is what the former commander of the 65th Army, General of the Army Pavel Ivanovich Batov, writes in his memoirs "In Campaigns and Battles": "Night fell on July 23 ... Colonel Nikitin almost ran into the dugout. The light of the kerosene lamp dimly illuminated his face, and perhaps that was why it seemed unusually pale.

- What's happened?

- A radio conversation was intercepted between the commander of the fifth SS Panzer Division "Viking" Gall (in reality, SS Gruppenfuehrer Herbert Gille. - B.S.) with the commander of the fourth Panzer Petzel. Gaul in Vysokolitovsk, Petzel in Belsk. At four o'clock they are preparing to deliver counter blows to our troops and link up in the area of Kleschel.

You could expect anything but this. No one imagined that from the north, from Belsk,

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such a threat. It was a miscalculation of our intelligence. The Germans correctly assessed the weakness of our right flank.

The enemy's counterattack pursued limited goals - to bring the Vysoko-Lithuanian grouping to link up with the Belskaya one. In order to speed up the solution of this task, General Gall asked the commander of the 4th German Panzer Division to help him in an open clerk on the radio (in Kazakevich's story, information about the Viking division is broadcast by Travkin's group in clear text).

And the Germans achieved their goals at that time, destroying the Soviet bridgehead beyond the Western Bug and withdrawing the main forces of the Viking division to Belsk to join with the 4th Wehrmacht Panzer Division. Here is what P.I. Batov: "One hundred tanks from the north and the same number from the south. In this situation, there was nothing left but to compress the main forces of the army grouping towards the center, leave part of the occupied territory, shorten the front line and take up all-round defense. There is very little time to give this order to the troops. We decide to transmit in clear text over the radio, masking the planned lines of defense with some numbers of the encoded map. In order not to waste precious minutes, I order you to tune the radios of all the corps to the same wavelength. The order is received by all commanders at the same time. Ivanov immediately reports that he has lost contact with the 69th. This division had to be given a task: to leave the bridgehead on the Western Bug and come to the aid of the corps command. But how do you report it? Standing next to me was a staff officer, Colonel Rondarev.

- Allow me to break through on a motorcycle.

He shook Rondarev's hand firmly.

Hurry, but be careful.

He raced off on a motorcycle to the Western Bug. He managed to slip along the roads not occupied by the enemy to the command post of the 69th and transmit the order.

By noon, it became clear that the northern and southern German groups would succeed in linking up. It's time for the operational group of the commander to retreat to Gainovka in order to organize a strike against the enemy that had broken through from there. The noise of battle was getting closer. But we still need to report the situation to Rokossovsky. Together

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with Nikolai Antonovich jumped into the cars to the telegraph operators. Rokossovsky answered quickly. I report: "The enemy delivers a counterattack from two directions to Kleschel. The army headquarters was assigned to Gaynovka. I myself am with the operational group and manage the battle on ... "

The report could not be completed. Nikolai Antonovich interrupted:

- Germans!

Through the open door of the bus, one could see how a tower of a German tank appeared in three hundred meters among the tall rye. The barrel of the cannon turned in our direction, and at the same moment there was a strong explosion. The enemy sent the first shell into a poorly camouflaged truck, on which the telegraph engine was mounted.

- All over me!

We rush to the rye field, where our "jeeps" were disguised by the road. Behind the second explosion. The telegraph plant caught fire. Fortunately, the telegraphers managed to run out with us. The "Willis" rushed along the rye field to Gaynovka, slipped literally a few tens of meters from the battle formations of the German tank unit. Saved by thick rye.

It was said that the front commander was very worried about the sudden cessation of negotiations and asked by radio: "Where is Batov?" Having received no answer, he sent a squadron of fighters to reconnaissance. We saw planes flying over the areas of Kleshshshely and Cheremkha, but the pilots did not find our aircraft. There was a joker among them: he reported from the plane on the radio to his immediate superior that he had seen on the way from Kleshchely to Gainovka... scattered military trade plates...

On July 24, the rifle corps of I. A. Gartsev and D. F. Alekseev, in cooperation with the 17th tank brigade, defeated the Germans near Kleschel and restored their former position in two days of fighting.

army troops. The enemy lost more than 40 tanks, up to 50 guns and over 5 thousand soldiers and officers, but he still managed to bring part of the military equipment to Belsk and

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compound headquarters. The remaining forces of the High Lithuanian group withdrew along the road to Drogochin.

The commander of the 1st Belorussian Front, Marshal K.K. resistance from the enemy, quickly overcame the forests of Belovezhskaya Pushcha, pulled ahead and then got into an unpleasant story, being attacked from two sides by units of two German tank divisions. They crashed into the center of the army, separated its troops into several groups, depriving the commander for some time of communication with most formations. There was a moment when our units mixed up with the German ones, and it was difficult to make out where ours was, where the enemy was; the battle took on a focal character.

I involuntarily remembered the battles of the end of 1914 in the area of Lodz, Brzeziny. Then a similar situation arose. Surrounded by Russian troops, the German corps, leaving the ring, surrounded the Russian units. Everything was mixed up... I myself had a chance to visit this "layer cake" - I served at that time in the 5th Kargopol Dragoon Regiment of the 5th Cavalry divisions.

... Parts and subunits of the 65th Army showed great restraint in such a difficult situation. They quickly took up all-round defense, repulsed enemy attacks, and tried to break through to each other. P. I. Batov and his staff took the necessary measures. The front command sent a rifle corps and a tank brigade to the rescue. The situation was restored, and the enemy, having suffered heavy losses, with difficulty carried off his feet. But Pavel Ivanovich had to endure difficult moments.

The harsh military reality was far from the optimistic ending of Zvezda: "It was important that the elite division with the formidable name Viking, concentrating in these forests in order to strike stealthily at the Soviet troops, was doomed to death. And cars, and tanks, and armored personnel carriers, and that SS man with a menacingly gleaming

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12 - Sokolov

pince-nez, and the Germans in a cart with a live pig, and all these Germans in general—guzzling, bawling, polluting the surrounding forests, all these Gilles, Müllenkamps, Gargaisses, all these careerists and punishers, hangmen and murderers—are walking along the forest - horns straight to their death, and death already lowers its punishing hand on all these fifteen thousand heads. Probably, one of Kazakevich's colleagues in military intelligence was hit hard for missing the Viking division in Vysokolitovsk. And in the story, he replayed, so to speak, "in our favor", the real plot, endowing it, according to the laws of the heroic myth, with a completely different outcome.

But it is even more interesting that there is a direct connection between the "Star" and "In August 44th". The head of Captain Alekhine and his comrades, Lieutenant Colonel Polyakov, a former professional writer and journalist, a myopic intellectual with glasses and a characteristic stutter, has his prototype ... Emmanuil Kazakevich. And the plot of the "Star" in Bogomolov's novel is present, but in an inverted form. At Kazakevich's, a Soviet reconnaissance group is trying to find and finds the Viking SS division secretly concentrated for a counterattack, and at the cost of their lives transmits invaluable information to the army headquarters. At Bogomolov's, a German reconnaissance group of former Soviet citizens is looking for a tank army secretly concentrated for an offensive in the rear, but some of them die, some of them are captured and do not fulfill their mission. Just as Kazakevich's scouts kill Germans after interrogating the "languages" of the Germans so as not to give themselves away, so Bogomolov's German

The reconnaissance group kills after torture Tamantsev's friend Leshka Basos, the driver Gusev, and others. And the "Neman" opposing them is their reflection in a crooked mirror, but by no means a caricature. Mishchenko is a double of Alekhine, the "hulk" is Tamantsev, the lieutenant-radio operator is Blinov.

And the setting of Bogomolov's novel, Western Belarus, coincides with that region, the Grodno and Vilna provinces, according to the administrative division of the tsarist era.

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meni, where the July counterattack of the Viking division took place, reflected in the story of Kazakevich.

Noesthu's "August '44" is another literary mirror. This is Alexander Solzhenitsyn's August 14th, published in the West shortly before Bogomolov's novel. Solzhenitsyn talked about the mediocre, losing offensive of the Russian armies on East Prussia. Bogomolov - about the brilliantly prepared and successful offensive of the Red Army on East Prussia 30 years later. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the head of the German reconnaissance group, Mishchenko, appears before us in the guise of a Red Army captain with a characteristic South Russian dialect. Solzhenitsyn was also a captain in the Red Army and was born and lived before the war in southern Russia.

In order to achieve such a parallel with Solzhenitsyn's novel, as we will show in the following essays, the writer even had to move the Memel operation of the 1st Baltic Front for a month, from September to August 1944. But the controversy with "August" is not limited to contrasting the failure of the Russian army during the invasion of East Prussia in August 14th and the successful actions of Soviet counterintelligence officers in August 44th, which ensured the successful invasion of the Red Army into East Prussia. Bogomolov also forces Stalin to personally take control of the Neman case. In fact, there were dozens and hundreds of similar groups operating among the Germans at the same time, mainly from prisoners and defectors. Such groups were sent in almost thousands. 90 percent of them were either immediately neutralized, or they themselves turned themselves in. But the Germans were counting on the few percent that would survive. And information about a group like "Neman" would never have gone further than the headquarters of the army. But Bogomolov needed Stalin - in order to refute the Stalin that Solzhenitsyn had, only not in August 1914, but in the novel In the First Circle. There Abakumov is pitiful and spiteful, whose cry of the soul is: "Comrade Stalin, return the death penalty to us." And Stalin is a gloomy dictator plotting a world war. For Bogomolov, Stalin is a wise strategist, well

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who versed in military affairs, and cruelty is the lot of Beria and Merkulov, who are ready to see the enemy in everyone, misinterpreting the instructions of the leader. Abakumov is the wisest of Stalin's interlocutors. With Solzhenitsyn, the Smershevites are executioners, more terrible to their officers and soldiers than to German spies, marauders who rob hundreds, thousands, Abakums, millions of rubles. Bogomolov's Smershevites are brave heroes, famously cracking down on spies, swinging the pendulum, shooting in Macedonian style (according to some veterans, the Smershevites often did not know how to shoot at all). The book turned out to be very useful ideologically, which is why it was very willingly republished in Soviet times. Despite the fact that the book is beautiful, the best that Bogomolov wrote, wonderfully conveying the life of the war, and without any untruth. But it still creates a myth!

BALATO BATTLE

Both Balaton battles, which took place in January and March 1945 in the region of Lake Balaton in Hungary, are rather poorly documented both from the Soviet and especially from the German side. The main documents on these battles have not yet been published. Worse, the main German documents related to the battles at Balaton have not yet been studied and introduced into scientific circulation. Most of them were captured by the Red Army as trophies in

the last days of the war and, most likely, is still stored unsorted in the Special Archive in Moscow. Due to the weakness of the documentary base, we are deprived of the opportunity to objectively compare the number of troops, weapons and military equipment and the losses of the parties. Reliance, especially on the German side, falls to a large extent on memoirs. When writing this chapter, we used the study by M. Svirin, O. Baronov, M. Kolomiets and D. Nedogonov "Fights at Lake Balaton".

The first Battle of Balaton in January 1945, in which the German 6th Army, including the SS Panzer Corps, tried to unblock Budapest and restore the defense along the Danube, began to be prepared by the German command even before the encirclement of the Hungarian capital. Such close attention to Hungary was explained by the fact that by the end of 1944 Germany had lost oil fields and refineries of Romania, which had gone over to the side of the Anti-Hitler coalition. In addition, almost all German plants for the production of synthetic fuel were destroyed by Anglo-American aviation. One

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The main oil fields and oil refineries that remained at the disposal of the Reich were located in the Austrian Zisterdorf and in the Hungarian territory west of Lake Balaton. As the former commander of Army Group South, Lieutenant-General Hans Frisner, recalls, "the army group received the so-called "directive instructions of the Führer" on the procedure for using the newly arrived tank formations in offensive operations - 3, 8th tank divisions and three battalions of tanks T-U "Panther". Hitler limited their use to only two sectors of the front: between lakes Balaton and Velence, or in the northeastern sector of the Budapest bridgehead. Hitler preferred the offensive between the lakes Balaton and Velence in the southeast direction and insisted on its speedy implementation. However, poor road conditions and swampy terrain in this area did not allow the tank forces to carry out a wide operational maneuver. On December 14, the command of the army group drew the attention of the OKH to this circumstance, declaring "that it cannot take responsibility for an immediate offensive with the tank forces provided to it in the conditions of mudslides. It considers it necessary to wait until frost sets in, when it will be possible to conduct operations without adhering to hard dirt roads.

The new army group operation, codenamed "Late Harvest," was being prepared in such a way as to start it immediately, as soon as weather conditions allowed and all the prerequisites for successful military operations were created.

The German troops were still not ready to launch a counterattack, although the encirclement of Budapest became an increasingly realistic prospect. The troops, which were soon surrounded in the Hungarian capital, numbered only 79 thousand people - 41 thousand Germans and 38 thousand Hungarians. By that time, the Hungarian units had very low morale and even defended their own capital without enthusiasm, foreseeing the inevitable defeat and the imminent end of the war. But the German troops in the Budapest garrison had in their

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most not too high fighting qualities. There were also the newly formed Hungarian SS divisions, and the people's grenadier divisions hastily sent to the front. Hitler did not attach much value to him and was ready to sacrifice, if only he would pull the Soviet troops back and slow down the Soviet offensive in Western Hungary. Later, in the event of a successful counterattack by the SS panzer divisions, he hoped to recapture the Hungarian capital and restore the defenses along the Danube.

Frisner recalled: "On December 17, the high command of the ground forces demanded an urgent counterattack by tank forces from the area of the lake defile near Szekesfehervar. I ordered once again to study and check all the initial data for the counterattack, in which the leadership

troops were to take over the headquarters of the 3rd tank corps. The command of the corps reported:

"The offensive can be carried out only under the condition of severe frosts, which will make the wetlands in this area passable for tanks. At the moment, the terrain is not favorable for the operation. The experience of the 3rd Panzer Corps in the battle near Cherkassy suggests that such conditions are fraught with the loss of most of the tanks introduced into the offensive. Even with a favorable development of the situation, tanks can get stuck in the mud and fail on the second day of the offensive.

The supply situation (the distribution of ammunition and fuel to the troops had not yet been completed) also indicated that at the moment the operation could not be carried out. Yaeshe was convinced of this by making an inspection tour of the troops, which ended with me getting stuck with my car in the mud. Rain alternated with snow. The roads were completely washed out. Under these conditions, I rejected the OKH's demand for an offensive and requested that it be postponed until the frost made it possible to use tank units and, above all, until sufficient ammunition and fuel were available. Under the existing circumstances, I could not take responsibility for the success of the counterattack, especially considering the general operational

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environment. Nevertheless, Guderian in the afternoon once again demanded an immediate offensive. A sharp telephone skirmish broke out between us, after which I decided to fly to Budapest. The Hungarian capital at that time was still full of people. The city was a peaceful Christmas picture, although the enemy stood at its very gates. All shops were open, city transport functioned as if nothing had happened. The streets were animated. The townspeople bought Christmas presents. The enemy only from time to time, at night, fired at the city from long-range guns. Air raids on the city were rare. Despite repeated submissions to the Hungarian government, the evacuation of the city was continually delayed. Perhaps it was practically impossible to carry it out.

Seeing all this, I was of the opinion that Budapest should not be regarded as a "fortress", especially since there were still hospitals in the city. To fight in the city, as Hitler demanded, and turn every house, every intersection into a center of defense, and even involve the townspeople themselves in the defense of the city, could only be utopianized by a fanatic.

I did not console myself with the hopes of a successful defense of a vast bridgehead against the enemy forces many times superior to us, and even more so I did not believe in the success of street fighting prescribed by Hitler's order. Street fighting could only lead to exhaustion. In addition, the enemy, according to all reports, did not even think about street fighting. He certainly intended to surround Budapest, together with the four divisions defending it, with a blow from the western bank of the Danube, as it eventually happened.

Given the general situation, I was of the opinion that all the troops operating in the eastern part of the Budapest bridgehead should be used to reinforce a well-thought-out and in-depth defense on the heights in the area of Szekesfehervár. I have not changed my views and to this day I believe that with such an organization of defense, the enemy would not have been able to make such a quick and deep breakthrough then. In addition, the troops, defending

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1 them Budapest, and the city itself would have been able to avoid the troubles that took place Later".

The Germans realized that the Hungarian army could not be relied upon. On March 19, 1945, Goebbels received the new Hungarian envoy in Berlin Mecher. After the meeting, the Gauleiter of Berlin wrote in his diary: "You absolutely cannot rely on the Magyars. They have already died without being dead yet. Messenger Szczer describes to me the real horrors, telling about the Bolshevik atrocities in the captured Hungarian cities, from which the blood runs cold. He adds that he informed the papal nuncio in Berlin about this, but the nuncio only shrugged his shoulders. Apparently, the nuncio in Berlin thinks the same way as the pope, namely that one should not tease the powerful of this world, but one should try not to argue with them, no matter how dirty they are doing.

The 8th Panzer Division had to be used for a counterattack at Ipolega, where the motorized infantry of the 3rd and 6th Panzer Divisions was also sent. The tanks of these divisions came under a powerful blow from the Soviet infantry, which began an assault on the Margarita position on December 20.

On December 23, Frisner, skeptical about holding on to Budapest, was removed from his post and replaced by General Otto Wöhler. The next day, December 24, Budapest was completely surrounded.

Here is what Paul Hausser writes about the battle of Lake Balaton: "Without the knowledge of the High Command of the Ground Forces (Heinz Guderian), on December 24, the Wehrmacht High Command gave the order to transfer the 1st SS Panzer Division (Herbert Gille) with the SS divisions "Dead Head" and "Viking" to Hungary and free Budapest. The leading edge of the German front ran from Lake Balaton through Shtulweisenburg (Sekenfehervar), Mohr, across the Altal River, near Tatabania, to the Danube east of Komarno ...

The corps was landed at Raab and Komarno; the bulk of the troops arrived on 31 December.

A counterattack with the aim of deblocking Budapest was carried out by the 6th Army of General Hermann Balck. In addition to the SS corps, outside in

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the 6th Panzer and 96th and 711th Infantry Divisions, as well as the Hungarian cavalry, marched.

Guderian protested against the transfer of 1st SS Panzer Corps to Hungary. In "Memoirs of a Soldier" he stated: "December 25, the first day of Christmas, I went by train to Zossen. I was on the road when Hitler, behind my back, ordered the transfer of Gille's SS corps, which included two SS divisions, from the area north of Warsaw, where it was concentrated behind the front as a reserve of the Reinhardt Army Group, to Budapest to break through the ring surroundings around this city. Reinhardt and I were in despair. This move by Hitler led to an irresponsible weakening of an already overextended front. All protests went unheeded. Liberation from the blockade of Budapest was more important to Hitler than the defense of East Germany. He began to give foreign policy reasons when I asked him to cancel this unfortunate event, and sent me out. Of the reserves raised to repulse the Russian advance (fourteen and a half panzer and motorized divisions), two divisions were sent to another front. There were only twelve and a half divisions left on a front of 1200 km.

Of course, Guderian was much more concerned about the defense of his native Pomerania than the deblockade of Budapest. But Hitler was absolutely right about the fact that it was impossible to continue the fight without fuel. It is not clear what Guderian counted on. An experienced commander, he must have realized that two extra panzer divisions would not help to defeat the Red Army in East Germany. Most likely, Guderian and other generals of the Wehrmacht even then, at the end of December 1944, when the failure of the Ardennes counteroffensive was already determined, they tried at all costs to detain the Soviet troops as far as possible from Berlin, hoping that the Anglo-American troops would be able to occupy the main part of Germany, including its capital, and the German troops will be able to surrender to him, and not to the Red Army. However, the collapse of resistance on the Western Front would inevitably lead to the collapse of resistance on the Eastern Front as well. The troops of the Eastern Front became

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whether to try to retreat to the West as quickly as possible in order to surrender to the British and Americans as soon as possible, ceding territory to the Red Army. But then, at the end of the 44th, she was much closer to Berlin than the Western allies.

And from the point of view of supplying fuel to tank divisions, it was more expedient to keep them closer to the last remaining oil refineries in German hands in Austria and Hungary. It was very difficult to supply tanks from there in Pomerania under the conditions when the Anglo-American aviation completely dominated the sky over the Reich, and transportation by rail was extremely difficult.

At that time, Hitler was considering a plan for a long-term defense of the Alpine Fortress, and for the success of such a defense, it was necessary to keep the oil fields and the NIZ of Western Hungary and Eastern Austria at any cost. It was possible to hold this area more or less reliably only by moving the line of defense to such a serious water barrier as the Danube. This goal was to be achieved by the operation to deblock Budapest.

It should be emphasized once again that the combat effectiveness of the Hungarian army was not high for some time. As the former commander of Army Group South, General Hans Friesner, recalled, "even in the hitherto considered reliable 10th and 12th Hungarian divisions operating east of Budapest, the first signs of decay appeared. Hungarian soldiers singly and in large groups, up to 100 people, with white flags, went over to the side of the enemy. In just 2-3 days, 5 officers and 1,200 soldiers ran across to the Russians. Trust in the Hungarian army was completely lost, and it was no longer possible to place stakes on it."

The same Friesner stated: "The way to Vienna through Nowy Zamki and Bratislava was then completely free. The entire area between the Danube and the Slovak border was a vacuum in which there was almost not a single German soldier. Now it cost nothing for the 2nd Ukrainian Front, under the cover of the Danube, to strike in the direction of Vienna. If Malinowski had known how few German forces opposed him here at that time, he would not have had to break

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head over this decision. However, he did not make such a decision.

However, at that moment, the Soviet command was thinking about an attack on Budapest, the quickest capture of which Stalin demanded, and had no information about the weakness of the German troops in the Vienna direction.

According to the "Last Harvest" plan, both SS Panzer divisions were to break through between Tatabánya and the Danube. "Viking" was supposed to advance on the right flank of the corps, and "Dead Head" - on the left. Having reached the Danube, both divisions were to turn to the southeast and bypass Mount Vertesh from the north in forests in order to reach the Bichke-Zhambek line. The neighbor of the corps on the left was supposed to cross the Danube and hit the rear of the Soviet troops, and then protect the flank of the "Dead Head" during the throw of the corps to Budapest.

The offensive began on January 1, 1945 at 6 pm Berlin time (8 pm Moscow time), without artillery preparation. The whole calculation was on surprise. The German command hoped that the Soviet soldiers and officers had not yet departed from the celebration of the New Year. The offensive in the dark guaranteed against the impact on the attackers from the Soviet air force dominating the air. There was no point in carrying out our own artillery preparation in the dark because of its low efficiency, so it was abandoned.

From the very first hours, the attackers encountered dense minefields at the exits from the mountains. The roads were blocked by anti-tank barriers. Parts of the 3rd Ukrainian Front were expecting an enemy offensive and were preparing to repel it. However, tactically, in time and place, the German offensive was sudden. Therefore, the initial goals of the upcoming

reached pretty quickly. On January 5, SS divisions entered the Bichke-Zhambek line, breaking away from their neighbors. Here, the SS tankers were forced to stop, as the defense of the open flanks ate too much strength, and the Soviet counterattacks became more and more fierce.

The breakthrough of the Germans in this direction forced the marshal

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Tolbukhin, on January 3, to issue an order for the urgent creation of a second line of defense at the Esztergom-Bichke line and the deployment of a tank and two mechanized corps there. Artillery from unattacked areas was also pulled here.

Already on the morning of January 4, a front-line defensive barrier was created in a strip about 25 kilometers wide. The main roads and exits from the defile of the mountains, the outskirts of settlements and the edges of the groves were occupied by motorized infantry, tanks and artillery batteries up to [52 mm], as well as anti-aircraft guns capable of hitting the "royal tigers". Anti-tank artillery regiments deployed on the flanks. Mortar, howitzer and heavy cannon regiments were located at closed firing positions. Two IPTAPs remained in the reserve of the front commander.

The average density of artillery assets in the direction of the enemy's main attack was increased to 56 guns and mortars per | kilometer of the front, and the depth of the anti-tank defense reached 10-14 kilometers.

The main blow was directed against the 4th Guards Army, which captured Szekesfehervar, more precisely, against its 31st Guards Rifle Corps. The army command was expecting an enemy attack on the sector of the 20th Guards Rifle Corps, so the enemy strike turned out to be tactically sudden. The corps was able to counter the enemy with only 217 guns from 45 to 122 mm, the density of which was half that along the front of the 4th Guards Army. On the Dunalmash-Bankhida sector, the front of the 31st Guards Corps was broken through. The Germans advanced up to 30 km.

In turn, the Budapest grouping of German-Hungarian troops, trying to break through the encirclement, pushed back the units of the 46th Army and captured Esztergom, but could not move further.
could.

During the breakthrough of the front of the 4th Guards Army, it turned out that the infantry, under the onslaught of tanks, retreated in disarray and left the artillery without cover. Most of the anti-tank obstacles, German tanks were able to

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bypass. As a result, the artillery of the 31st Guards Corps lost 70% of its equipment and up to two thirds of its personnel, since many batteries and anti-tank strongholds were surrounded.

On January 2, aircraft of the Soviet 17th Air Army, commanded by General V.A. Sudets, made 671 sorties, aircraft of the German 4th Air Fleet, limited by a severe shortage of fuel, only 450.

When the divisions [At the tank corps] reached the area of the city of Tat on January 4, they were met here by the 12th anti-tank artillery brigade from the reserve of the 46th Army. Parts of the 86th Rifle Division withdrew in disarray, and the artillerymen were again left without infantry cover. Because of this, the 1255th anti-tank regiment lost 14 guns, 4 vehicles, 12 tractors and 45 people killed and wounded and was forced to retreat.

It must be borne in mind that the Soviet soldiers at that moment had already undergone a significant degree of moral decay. Clear evidence of this in relation to Hungary

contained in the memoirs of Alain Poltz, who later became a well-known psychologist. She recalls: "... at night a whole detachment broke into us, then they knocked us to the floor, it was dark and cold, they were shooting around. A picture remained in my memory: eight ten Russian soldiers are squatting around me, and each in turn lies down on me. They set a quota of how many minutes for each. They looked at wristwatches, lit matches every now and then, one even had a lighter - they kept track of time. They hurried each other. One question: "Is the robot good?"...

How much time has passed and how many there were - I do not know. By dawn, I realized how a spinal fracture occurs. They do this: they put the woman on her back, throw her legs to her shoulders, and the man enters from above, kneeling. If you lean too hard, the woman's spine will crack. It turns out this is unintentional: just in a frenzy of violence, no one restrains himself. The spine, twisted like a cochlea, is constantly squeezed, swayed at one point and they do not notice when it breaks. I also thought that they would kill me, that I

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I will die in their hands. My spine was injured but not broken. Since in this position you always rub your back against the floor, the skin from my back was torn off, my shirt and dress stuck to my knees - it bled, but I paid attention to this only later. And then I didn't notice it - my whole body hurt so much.

And there are many similar episodes in these memoirs. True, Poltz makes the reservation that in the Russian villages the Hungarian soldiers behaved only slightly better. And she still had warmer memories of the Russian soldiers than of the Germans, especially since during the fighting her town of Chakvao changed hands several times: "The Germans returned, then the Russians again. I have always been more afraid of the Germans. If they say: "execution" - you can be sure - they will surely execute you. Fear began with the Gestapo, and there was something atavistic in it. The persecution of the Jews only deepened it.

With the Russians, nothing could ever be foreseen, predicted; surprising how, with their disorganization,

'they did something at all. If they left, they never said goodbye, but simply disappeared. Returning, they greeted us with incredible joy, loud cries, picked us up, threw us into the air, as if they had met the closest and dearest people. They were people with a good heart, but incredibly wild."

Nevertheless, what is important in this case, mass rapes, robberies and executions of civilians corrupted the Red Army, which had many recruits from the recently liberated territories. Due to the huge irretrievable losses, ten times higher than the German ones, the proportion of soldiers who had combat experience and were accustomed to military discipline was extremely small by the end of the war. This was especially true of the infantry, where the losses were especially great. Therefore, she largely lost her combat capability by the end of the war. On the contrary, in artillery, the losses were relatively less, respectively, the proportion of experienced soldiers and officers was higher. Therefore, they were able to successfully resist enemy tanks.

It is characteristic, by the way, that the fighters of the SS divi

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During the period of fighting in Hungary, no one has been accused of war crimes, as well as crimes against humanity, until now.

In the meantime, the anti-tank reserves of the 46th Army were transferred to the breakthrough site: two cannon regiments, a howitzer regiment, as well as a mortar regiment, a regiment of guards mortars and a combined battalion of captured Panther tanks. Other significant reserves from the 2nd Ukrainian Front were transferred to the Zhambek-Bichke line. By January 5 coming

The German group was opposed by 31 artillery regiments of the RVGK, 8 artillery divisions and 8 regiments of heavy and guards mortars. The second line of defense was occupied by the 1st Guards Mechanized Corps of General Russiyanov, the 18th Tank Corps of General Govorunenko and the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps of General Gorshkov. In total, the Soviet grouping had 1305 guns and large-caliber mortars and 210 tank self-propelled guns (SU.-76). Among the tanks there were more than 70 American M-4 Shermans.

By the evening of January 5, the German offensive was stopped. After the end of the combat trophy team of the 4th Guards Army, they found 5 wrecked "royal tigers", 2 "tigers", 7 "panthers", 19 T-TU, 6 T-Sh, 5 75-mm assault guns, 19 armored personnel carriers and armored vehicles. According to the reports of the Soviet units, [20 German tanks and assault guns and about 100 armored personnel carriers were shot down in these battles.

Unable to organize a breakthrough to Budapest from Komarno, the German command hastily planned a second counterattack - from the area northwest of Szekesfehevar. The offensive was supposed to be carried out in two directions: from the northwest to Bichka and from the southwest to Zamol. This was supposed to lead to the encirclement of the formations of the 3rd Ukrainian Front operating near Bichke. After that, both German groups had to break through to Budapest.

The offensive was carried out by three German tank divisions in each of the groupings.

The attack on Zamol began at 08:40 on January 7. On

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The combat formations of the 5th Guards Airborne Division of the 20th Guards Rifle Corps, Major General N. I. Biryukov, advanced more than 120 tanks and assault guns. German attacks resumed 40 minutes later in the zone of the 31st Guards Rifle Corps in the direction of Bichke.

The gunners of the 9th and 42nd anti-tank artillery brigades of colonels I. V. Grishchenko and K. A. Leonov fought especially staunchly and inflicted great damage on the enemy in the area of Szekesfehevar and Zamol. For example, the battery of Major A.N. Borodai burned 5 and knocked out 4 enemy tanks in 40 minutes of battle.

In five days, in the area of Szekesfehevar, the Germans advanced only 7 kilometers, and near Bichke, they remained almost at their original positions.

Due to overcast clouds and frequent snowfalls with rains, Soviet air reconnaissance was unable to determine where the German tank divisions were regrouping. The headquarters of the front received conflicting reports on this matter.

Guderian was skeptical about the results of the first days of the attack on Budapest. In his memoirs, he wrote: "On January 1, I again went to Hitler to report to him that Gille's corps, as part of Balck's 6th Army, would launch an attack on Budapest that evening. Hitler had high hopes for this offensive. I was skeptical, because there was very little time to prepare the offensive, the command and troops did not have the impulse that they had before. Despite initial success, the offensive failed... Over the course of several days, from January 5 to 8, 1945, I visited General Wöhler, Frisner's successor as commander of Army Group South, General Balck and SS General Gille and discussed with them the continuation of operations in Hungary. I received information about the reasons for the failure of the attack on Budapest. In all likelihood, this happened because the initial success of the evening battle on January 1 was not used at night to make a decisive breakthrough. We had no more officers and soldiers in 1940, otherwise we might have reached

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direction, the command of the 6th German Army managed to covertly transfer two tank corps against the left flank of the 4th Guards Army by January 17th.

Now five German tank divisions and several Hungarian infantry and cavalry units took part in the counterattack. They had 600 tanks and 1200 guns and mortars. |

The Germans were going to break through the Soviet defenses between the lakes Velence and Balaton and with a swift rush to the Danube, cut the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front into pieces, and then, turning north, go to Budapest.

The offensive in the area between Balaton and Berkhida began on January 18 at 4.30 am (there was bad weather on that day). It was not expected here. The purpose of the offensive was to break through the positions of the 4th Guards Army and reach Budapest from the south. On this day, Soviet aviation nevertheless made 718 sorties, but its actions were ineffective. The whole first day was spent slowly gnawing through the defenses, where the main obstacles were minefields and wire fences under current. The blow was taken by the formations of the 135th Rifle Corps, Major General P.V. Gnedin. Thanks to the suddenness of the attack, the German tank divisions broke through the defenses and reached the Danube in the areas of Dunapentele and Adon on the morning of January 20. Separate tank units also reached the approaches to Dunafeldvar, where the front headquarters was located, guarded by only one battery of 45-mm anti-tank guns. The 3rd Ukrainian Front was cut in two. The situation was complicated by the fact that on the eve of a strong ice drift demolished all pontoon crossings across the Danube.

Having shot down parts of the 135th Rifle Corps, German tanks began to cover Szekesfehervar from the north and south. German troops continued fighting at night. These actions were carried out in small groups (1-3 tanks or assault guns), which were supported by cars, tractors or armored personnel carriers with lit headlights, creating the appearance of a large tank unit. Sometimes, for this purpose, dummies of tanks with lit headlights were used, designed to arouse the fire of Soviet artillery.

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Thanks to the night vision devices with infrared night sights used for the first time during the advance to Budapest, which ensured firing at distances up to 400 meters, German tanks and assault guns fired very accurately at night.

On January 19, in the defense zone of the 18th Panzer Corps, a wrecked assault gun with such a device was captured. After that, to combat this innovation, the Red Army began to procure fuel and, when enemy tanks approached, light fires, which were supposed to disorient night vision devices that capture thermal radiation.

For their part, the Soviet troops tried to illuminate the night battlefield with flares and searchlights, but this did not give much effect. Moreover, the searchlights themselves were good targets for German tanks.

Panthers and other German tanks also received night vision devices, which led to heavy losses of Soviet tanks in both battles at Balaton.

On January 19, the Viking crossed the Sharviz Canal at Kalosh and Shoponya. By that time, according to tradition, the Soviet rifle units were the first to withdraw to the eastern bank of the canal, leaving artillerymen on the western bank, who almost all died, but detained the enemy. To meet the grouping that had broken through, the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front advanced the 133rd Rifle Corps with two IPTAPs and the 18th Tank Corps with a SU-76 regiment. These troops entered the battle on the move, scattered and without proper preparation. They were defeated by Viking tankers and partially surrounded, although due to the small number of German troops, the ring was not tight. On January 21, the remnants of the encircled troops went to the location of the 57th Army. At the same time, almost all artillery was lost, since the retreating infantrymen requisitioned artillery tractors and horses so that it would be more convenient to get away from the Germans. The 18th Panzer Corps irretrievably lost half of its tanks, including due to lack of fuel, as well as tractors for evacuating damaged vehicles.

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tires. The 110th tank brigade of the corps drove 20 of its tanks into the swamp, where they remained idle for several days.

I had to urgently create a defense zone between Lake Velence and the city of Adon on the Danube. 30 artillery regiments were removed from the non-attacked sectors of the front and thrown into the breakthrough area. Here was created a density of up to 32 guns and mortars per | | front kilometer. As a result, the SS Panzer Divisions Viking and Totenkopf were stopped. Maneuverable groups of corps, army and front artillery quickly advanced into the areas of the offensive of German tanks. In this case, the density of artillery in some areas reached 50-100 or more guns per | front kilometer.

From the evening of January 17 to January 19, 1945, the 10th anti-tank brigade of Colonel A.V. Knyaz fought fiercely with enemy tanks south of Szekesfehevar. As a result of uninterrupted air raids, enemy tank and artillery fire, the brave brigade lost half of its guns.

On January 20, the 3rd Panzer Division, advancing on the right flank, reached the Danube. On January 21, the 1st Panzer Division took Szekesfehevar (Stuhlweissenburg), advancing on the city from the southeast. The Soviet infantry, due to the threat of encirclement, was forced to retreat to the Chala region. The withdrawal was covered by the 338th IPTAP, two consolidated infantry battalions and a consolidated company of captured tanks. The stray carts of the 4th Guards Army and part of the infantry units retreating in disarray and having lost their combat effectiveness also stuck to the rearguard. IPTAP set fire to a tank and an armored personnel carrier, but was forced to leave four guns and three tractors during the withdrawal. Also, all captured "panthers" were abandoned, for which there was no fuel.

At 10 am on January 23, two groups of 50-60 machine gunners, supported by 4 tanks, in the area of the Chala station bypassed the positions of the 338th IPTAP. |

As a result, the 3rd Ukrainian Front was cut in two, and its grouping in the Szekesfehevar area was threatened with encirclement. Ice drift began on the Danube, demolishing the pontoon

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bridges and ferry crossings. Soviet troops on the right bank of the Danube were supplied only with the help of cable cars. However, the ice drift ultimately saved the 3rd Ukrainian Front from even more trouble, because because of it, the troops of the SS Panzer Corps were unable to cross the Danube and seize a bridgehead for an attack on Budapest. As usual, the Soviet infantry, covering the guns, fled at the sight of the tanks, crossing the canal located in the rear of the positions. At the same time, the sappers blew up the bridges across the canal. Artillerymen of the 338th IPTAP, with the help of one self-propelled gun, on the armor of which there were several sappers, were able to repair one of the bridges and, using self-propelled guns, ferry nine tractors and three guns through the canal. The rest of the guns and tractors had to be abandoned. At 4 pm, the 762nd IPTAP approached the canal, preventing the Germans from forcing it.

Only on January 23, after heavy fighting, the Viking was able to reach the Danube near Adoni. Soviet troops retreated to the Zamol-Chala-Lake Velence line.

On January 21, due to the deteriorating situation in the area of Lake Balaton, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command entrusted the coordination of the actions of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts to Marshal S.K. Ukrainian front. The marshal sent a part of the 5th Air Army of General Goryunov from the 2nd Ukrainian Front to support the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, which was repelling an enemy counterattack. On 22 January, 1,034 sorties were flown, helped by improved weather. However, the actions of aviation did not lead to the cessation of the German offensive. It should be noted that the 17th Air Army of the 3rd Ukrainian Front made 16,501 sorties in January and, according to the reports of the pilots, shot down 280 enemy planes.

About 100 German tanks were advancing between Lake Velence and the Danube with infantry support. But they were able to advance only 3-4 km.

The command of the 6th German Army again had to regroup. January 25 [U SS Panzer Corps

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was turned to attack Budapest along the right bank of the Danube. The offensive was to begin from the line of the Föley River. In turn, the 57th Army was deployed with a front to the north. The 5th Guards Cavalry Corps and units of the 1st Guards Mechanized Corps were hastily deployed between Lake Velence and the Danube, reinforced by 13 artillery and mortar regiments assembled from various sectors of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts. Two brigades of the 1st Guards Mechanized Corps, equipped with Sherman tanks, entered the battle on the move and lost 70% of their military equipment. The narrow-tracked Shermans found it difficult to maneuver in the mud that had formed due to the frequent thaws. The complete destruction of the corps was prevented by the SU-100 regiment urgently thrown to its aid. And the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps was helped to hold its positions by an engineering assault brigade and a howitzer division.

Gille was a supporter of the attack on Budapest. However, the commander of the 6th Army, Balk, proposed to continue the offensive to the northwest and west against a strong grouping of Soviet troops concentrated west of the Danube.

January 25 [At 9 o'clock in the morning, the SS Panzer Corps began an offensive from the Zámoly area towards Miskolc. It was attended by 12 "panthers" and 10 "royal tigers". Their opponent was the 1272nd IPTAN. Having lost 16 guns, 39 killed and 47 wounded in 6 hours of battle, he, according to the report of his commander, destroyed 10 "royal tigers" and "panthers", as well as three medium tanks and 6 assault guns (it is not very clear where they came from taken). 119 corpses of German soldiers allegedly remained on the battlefield. And again, it is not clear who counted them if the battlefield was left to the Germans. During these battles, the tanks of the 1st Guards Mechanized Corps mistakenly crushed 5 Soviet guns, taking them for the German ones.

On January 26, two German infantry regiments and up to 60 tanks made a breakthrough in the Kápolnás-Baracka area. During these battles, the Soviet infantry knocked out 4 Soviet Shermans, mistaking them for enemy tanks. To meet them, in the Val-Verteshach area, the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front advanced the 104th Rifle and 23rd Tank Corps, as well as

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104th SU-100, 1501st and 184th ITPAP and 1669th SAP (Su-76). As a result, the advancing German grouping was stopped 26-29 km from Budapest.

On January 27, the offensive of the Soviet troops began from the Nagy-Dunapentele region, reaching the lines of communication [Near the SS Panzer Corps. The German command began to deploy the corps with the front to the south. On January 27-28, the 110th Tank Brigade ran into an ambush of German tanks and assault guns and lost 15 tanks.

On January 29, the offensive of this Soviet grouping began from the Vertesh Aska region. There was a big tank battle at Pettend. The Germans estimated Soviet losses at 200 tanks. Such heavy losses were the result of the qualitative superiority of German armored vehicles and tankers. The commanders of the 18th and 23rd tank corps, contrary to orders from above, used primarily non-self-propelled and anti-tank artillery, attack tanks, to fight enemy tanks, and suffered heavy losses.

On January 30, the positions of the 2nd German Panzer Army south of Lake Balaton were also hit. [At the SS Panzer Corps, due to flank threats, was forced to retreat west on both sides of Velence. But the German troops were able to hold the area between Velence and Tszamola, forming a front along the line between Lake Velence and Lake Balaton.

The German-Hungarian group surrounded in Budapest included low-combat and low-mobility formations (this was especially true of the Hungarian divisions), which were unable to deliver an effective strike against the deblocking group. Therefore, Hitler insisted on the defense of Budapest to the last possible. He knew that the troops defending him were not suitable for maneuvering and would be easily destroyed if they tried to break out of the city on their own. As Frisner noted, "in addition to the Hungarian units, troops of the 3rd Panzer Corps, consisting of the 8th and 22nd SS Cavalry Divisions, the 13th Panzer Division and the Feldherrnhalle motorized division, were introduced to the Budapest bridgehead, and on the island of Szentend- re, located north of the city, is the 357th Infantry Division

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ziya, reinforced by a separate machine-gun battalion "Saxony". He also admitted: "The 18th SS cavalry division, formed mainly from Hungarian Germans, was completely demoralized and surrendered piece by piece to the enemy." The 22nd SS Cavalry Division, which also consisted of Hungarian Volksdeutsche, was a little better defending Budapest. The Budapest grouping made an attempt to break through on the night of 11] to February 12, 1945, when all hope of outside help had already evaporated, and ammunition had run out. Only 785 people reached their own, including 170 SS men. The rest of the units surrendered, including the 8th SS Cavalry Division Florian Geyer. Its commander, SS Brigadeführer Joachim Rumor, committed suicide. It should be noted that, although the 8th SS Cavalry Division was formed in June 1942, its combat capability was not great. Its basis was the Fegelein Cavalry Brigade, which was mainly engaged in punitive operations against partisans. In total, more than 100,000 German and Hungarian soldiers surrendered during the battle for Budapest.

Former commander of the 17th Air Army, Air Marshal V.A. Sudets recalled that during the liquidation of the Budapest garrison, an incident occurred that quarreled between F. I. Tolbukhin and R. Ya. Malinovsky. On February 13, 1945, Malinovsky reported to the Headquarters about the capture of Budapest. But he made a reservation that 16-20 thousand German and Hungarian soldiers were still resisting in the city.

The next day, the commander of one of the anti-aircraft regiments [of the 7th Air Army, deployed to Budapest to fight the remnants of the encircled grouping, contacted the commander of the air army by phone and said:

— Comrade Commander, a large fascist formation has been destroyed. One lieutenant general was captured and with him several more generals and officers. What would you like to do with them? Where to deliver them?

The judge, who was next to Tolbukhin and Nedelin, informed them of this report. Tolbukhin ordered to immediately deliver the German generals to the command post of the front. But they never arrived at Tolbukhin. And in the evening

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The Soviet Information Bureau reported that on February 15, the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front defeated the remnants of the encircled enemy grouping in the Budapest area, capturing its commander and two more generals.

Tolbukhin demanded an explanation from Sudets. He could only name the exact time when the commander of the anti-aircraft regiment left with the German generals from the place of their captivity. At the request of the marshal, Sudets called Malinovsky and asked him to inform Moscow about how things were in reality.

"The deed is done, why talk about it now? Malinowski said irritably.

Then Tolbukhin immediately called Headquarters and reported to Stalin on who had captured the last German generals in Budapest. The Supreme Commander, according to Sudets, decided
So:

- We will not give denials, but we will consider that it was your 3rd Ukrainian Front that won the final victory over the enemy in Budapest.

When the commander of the anti-aircraft regiment of the 17th Air Army finally arrived at the headquarters of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, he said that, following the order of the commander, he was transporting captured generals in two passenger cars with heavy guards. However, on the way he was stopped by employees of the Special Department of the 2nd Ukrainian Front and ordered to deliver the prisoners to Malinovsky's command post. This is how the marshals shared the laurels of the conquerors of Budapest two months before Zhukov and Konev argued about who had taken Berlin.

On February 19, 1945, the artillery headquarters of the 3rd Ukrainian Front received an order from the Artillery Directorate of the Red Army and the People's Commissariat for Armaments "On conducting a survey of new types of German tanks and self-propelled guns destroyed during defensive battles in the area of Lake Balaton - lake. Velence - r. Danube". At the end of February 1945, a commission led by the chief of artillery of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, M.I.

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marking and examination of 90 different types of German armored vehicles, including heavy new types of medium tanks and various types of assault guns and armored personnel carriers.

In total, 7 "royal tigers", 31 "panthers", 12 T-III, 4 T-Sh, 32 assault guns and 4 armored personnel carriers were found. Of the 90 armored vehicles, 86 were hit by artillery fire and 4 were blown up by mines. It is very significant that not a single tank was hit from the air, which indicates the relatively low effectiveness of Soviet aviation against tanks, despite its air supremacy. Undoubtedly, the Soviet irretrievable losses in tanks were much higher, if only because the battlefield remained with the Germans, and they were able to evacuate the wrecked armored vehicles before retreating to the line of lakes. A different situation developed, as we will see later, towards the end of the second battle in the area of Lake Balaton, when, due to lack of fuel and the threat of encirclement, the Germans were forced to abandon not only the damaged, but also a significant part of the proper armored vehicles.

In total, 7 burnt tanks of the "tiger" type, 31 "panther" tanks, 12 T-III tanks, 4 T-Sh tanks, 32 various self-propelled guns and 4 armored personnel carriers were investigated. Of the 90 examined armored units, 86 were destroyed by artillery fire and 4 were blown up by mines, and 80 vehicles burned down. On all samples, 152 shell holes, 35 cases of caterpillar damage, 5 cases of gun barrel penetration and two cases of tank turrets were found. Of the 152 holes, 100 (65.8%) accounted for a set of tanks and self-propelled guns, 27 (17.8%) - on the stern and 25 (16.4%) - on the forehead of the hull. 49 holes were made by armor-piercing shells of 76-mm guns, 30-57-mm shells, 50 - by shells of an unidentified type (most likely by the cores of sub-caliber shells), three holes were made by cumulative mines "faustpatrons", or only 20 holes accounted for shells of all other types. However, the studied samples of equipment also had numerous "abrasions" and "scars" from a wide variety of shells, bullets and other ammunition (for example,

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measures, melted non-through "ulcers" from "faustpatrons"), which did not lead to penetration of the armor.

According to German data, in the January battles, the Viking and Totenkopf divisions lost about 8,000 people killed, including about 200 officers. They bore the brunt of the attack.

After the completion of the battles for Budapest, the troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts began to prepare for an offensive in the Bratislava-Brnovsk direction. To do this, the 27th army of General

Trofimenko was transferred from the 2nd Ukrainian Front to the 3rd, and the 46th Army and the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps, on the contrary, from the 3rd to the 2nd. The 2nd Ukrainian Front was additionally reinforced by the 9th Guards Army and the Danube Military Flotilla.

According to S. M. Shtemenko, "already on February 17, three days after the capture of Budapest, the Stavka gave directives to the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts to prepare and conduct the Vienna offensive operation. The main role in it was assigned to the troops of R. Ya. Malinovsky. Their main forces were to advance north of the Danube, where the enemy, according to the scouts, had no tanks, and his defense relied mainly on infantry. The troops of F. I. Tolbukhin, operating to the south, were opposed, according to intelligence, by seven tank divisions. Initially, these troops were assigned a modest task: to assist their neighbor on the right, the 2nd Ukrainian Front. Some changes were made in the composition of the fronts due to the mutual transfer of troops. The strong 9th Guards Army of General V.V. Glagolev was sent from the reserve of the Headquarters to the disposal of R. Ya. Malinovsky (in the Szolnok region). The 1st Bulgarian Army, subordinated to F.I. Tolbukhin, received the task of ensuring the operation of the front from the south, operating along the northern bank of the Drava. The start of the offensive was scheduled for March 15.

It was planned that the troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts would eliminate the German army group "South" and capture the cities of Bratislava, Brno and Vienna, capturing the last industrial region that still remained in the hands of Germany.

However, to carry out the planned offensive prevented

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a new German counterattack, for which the 6th SS Panzer Army was transferred from the Western Front.

Paul Hausser recalled: "After the failure in the Ardennes, views in Berlin sharply diverged regarding the further use of the 6th SS Panzer Army. While the High Command of the Land Forces (Heinz Guderian) proposed a pincer operation from Silesia (Glogau-Cottbus) and Pomerania to ensure effective defense of Berlin, the High Command of the Wehrmacht (Adolf Hitler) ordered the deployment of the army in Hungary. The outcome of the war was not decided here! Military-economic reasons, oil near Lake Balaton were not sufficient grounds for such a strategy. Thus, at the end of January, an order was given to transfer the army from the Western Front. The situation on the railroad allowed only four echelons to be transported at the same time, so the army headquarters arrived in the Raab (Gyor) area on February 20, while the last units did not arrive until early March. The divisions were somehow replenished."

Strictly speaking, the use of the 6th SS Panzer Army in Silesia or Pomerania would still not lead to a turning point on the Eastern Front. Of course, in this case, the Soviet offensive in the Berlin direction would have slowed down. However, it was already stopped right up to April 16, but by no means because of fears that the 6th SS Panzer Army would be transferred to Berlin or Pomerania. Yes, and she could get there in full force, as Hausser testifies, only at the beginning of March, which, in order to prevent the Soviet attack on Berlin, which, according to the estimates of the headquarters of the 1st Belorussian Front, should have begun already on 9-10 February would be too late. The reason for the cancellation of this offensive, already developed at Zhukov's headquarters, was that Stalin ordered, before the attack on Berlin, to concentrate all efforts on capturing Pomerania and East Prussia. He feared that there, as well as in Courland, the Western allies might land, to whom the German troops would willingly surrender. And thus the prey will escape from

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If the 6th SS Panzer Army had been sent to Silesia or Pomerania, as Guderian suggested, then the Soviet troops in Hungary would have launched an offensive in mid-March, as planned, and would have taken over the oil fields and refineries in Hungary and Austria, as well as Austrian

capital no more than two weeks. This is how events unfolded in late March and early April, after the collapse of the German counter-offensive in Hungary. And this despite the fact that then the 6th SS Panzer Army remained in the south and continued to fight on Hungarian and Austrian territory. Without it, the Soviet troops would have moved even faster. And in the event that the army of Sepp Dietrich operated in Pomerania, it would very soon, by the end of March, be left without fuel.

From Hitler's point of view, there was not only military-economic, but also military-strategic logic in the transfer of the 6th SS Army to Hungary. Until mid-April, the Fuhrer was going to defend himself not in Berlin, but in the "Alpine fortress", which included Austria and Bavaria, as well as the adjacent regions of Italy and the Czech Republic. Hungary just covered the "Alpine fortress" from the East. And it is no coincidence that the most loyal to Hitler and combat capable SS divisions were concentrated in the south. They were supposed to defend the Alpine Fortress. Hitler hoped, with the help of the army of Sepp Dietrich, to push back the Soviet troops to the Danube. He did not count on encircling and destroying the troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts, taking into account the limitations of his own forces.

Given these considerations, we can say that the defeat of the 6th SS Panzer Army of Balaton was one of those events that predetermined the collapse of the idea of the Alpine Fortress.

According to the testimony of the officers of the 6th SS Army, who were captured by the Soviets, their army was supposed to go to the Danube, cut the 3rd Ukrainian Front in half, and then, turning north to the south, destroy the main formations of this front. After that, the 6th SS Panzer Army was supposed to leave for Che

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Khoslovakia in order to continue to operate in the central sector.

These testimonies and their interpretation by intelligence agencies and the headquarters of the 3rd Ukrainian Front raise serious doubts. Neither in the German documents, nor in the memoirs of those involved in planning the operation, Guderian and Dietrich, such ambitious tasks as the destruction of the main forces of the 3rd Ukrainian Front are mentioned. Thus, Guderian defines the goals of the offensive at Balaton much more modestly. He notes that Army Group South "had its task: after the approach of reserves from the west, go on the offensive on both sides of Lake Balaton in order to capture the right bank of the Danube, strengthen the southern flank of the Eastern Front and cover the oil-bearing regions." It is easy to see that Guderian says nothing about any destruction of the opposing Soviet forces. Both he and Hitler were well aware that the Germans would not have enough strength to arrange new Cannes for the Soviet troops in Hungary, especially taking into account the catastrophic situation for the Wehrmacht on other fronts. And the idea that the 6th Panzer Army was supposed to go to Czechoslovakia through the Soviet rear on its own looks absurd. Such a march, especially in the conditions of off-road spring conditions and inevitable clashes with Soviet troops, threatened the 6th SS Panzer Army with the loss of almost the entire fleet of armored vehicles.

The offensive of the 6th SS Panzer Army near Lake Balaton is often compared to the German offensive in the Ardennes in December 1944. In terms of the number of forces involved from the German side, including tanks, these operations turn out to be comparable, but their goals were of a completely different order. During the Ardennes Offensive, Hitler hoped to capture Antwerp, paralyze the supply of the Allied forces and force them to evacuate from the continent. The depth of the Western theater of operations compared with the Eastern one was small, which made it possible to cherish such ambitious plans, although there were no real chances for their achievement. In Hungary, the offensive at Balaton pursued only a purely tactical goal - access to the Danube, which should

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It was necessary to improve the conditions for the defense of the oil-bearing regions of Hungary and Austria and to prevent a Soviet offensive in this sector of the front in the near future.

Conflicting information was received about where the 6th SS Panzer Army was being transferred from the West. So, on February 20, 1945, the head of the American Military Mission in Moscow, Brigadier General John R. Dean, asked the Chief of the Soviet General Staff (GS), General of the Army AI Antonov, to receive him on an important matter. During the meeting, J. R. Dean transmitted American intelligence data, from which it followed that the Germans were creating two groups for a counteroffensive against the Red Army: one in Pomerania for an attack on Thorn, the second in the Vienna region, Moravsk Ostrava for offensive in the direction of Lodz. At the same time, the inclusion of the 6th SS Panzer Army was supposed to be included in the southern grouping. A week earlier AI Antonov received similar information from the head of the army section of the British Military Mission in Moscow, Colonel Brinkman. But, strictly speaking, these data could not affect Stalin's decision to abandon the immediate attack on Berlin, which was taken as early as the beginning of February.

True, on January 27, the head of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Red Army, Lieutenant General I.I. Il'ichev, reported: "It has been established that the 1st, 2nd and The Ardennes were transferred in a northern and northeastern direction, but the appearance of 6 TA SS on the Soviet-German front is not excluded. The primary source of these data was Lieutenant General A.F. Vasiliev, head of the Soviet Military Mission in Great Britain, who, in turn, received them from the British military department. It must be emphasized that these data, reported by Ilyichev to the leadership of the General Staff, were too vague to allow any final decision to be made on their basis.

On January 31, 1945, Ilyichev sent a more definite special message to I.V. Stalin:

"1. The 6th SS Panzer Army is urgently transferred from the Western European to the Soviet German front.

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* The loading of army units into echelons was to begin in the area of Dusseldorf, Wupertal and Cologne on January 27 and end by February 3-5, 1945.

The unloading of 6 TA SS will be carried out, apparently, in the Central Sector of the Front, and not in Silesia. This assumption is made on the basis of the following data: ...

- officers of the 12th SS Panzer Division, which is part of the 6th SS Panzer Army, were ordered to return from vacations to the Schneidemuhl area;

— the Fuhrer escort brigade, which is part of the 6th SS Panzer Army, was ordered to receive tanks and human reinforcements in Cottbus...".

Next came data on the composition of the 6th SS Panzer Army, which included:

«...| tdSS "Adolf Hitler" - 11,000 people], 40 tanks; 2 TD SS "Reich" - 12,500 people, 60 tanks; 9 SS TD "Hohenstaufen" - 10,000 people, 40 tanks; 12 TD SS "Hitler-Jugend" - 9000 people, 40 tanks; escort brigade "Fuhrer" - 6000 people, 20 tanks; infantry brigade "Fuhrer" - 4000 people, 20 tanks. The transfer of the 6th SS Panzer Army to the Soviet-German front is encoded in German messages by the code name of the operation "SOteu" ("Gray").

2. There are indications that part of the forces of the 5th Panzer Army and the 19th Army may also be transferred from the Western European to the Soviet-German front. The two armies received instructions in which instructions were given on the procedure for the actions of the disembarking troops against the attacking enemy.

From the composition of these armies, the following can be transferred to the Soviet-German front:

- from the 5th tank army - 11, 116 tank divisions, 3 and 5 artillery divisions;
- from the 19th army - the 17th artillery division.

Concluding the report, I.I. Ilyichev reported: "...According to the official data of the British, transmitted on January 30, 1945 to the head of our Military Mission in England, Lieutenant General Vasiliev, a significant part of the forces of the 6th SS Panzer Army on January 24-26, 1945 was transferred from the Dussel areas

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dorf, Neisse, Krefeld on Osnabrück. The British believe that 6 TA SS should be fully concentrated in the Frankfurt am Main area on February 7, 1945. To date, there are a little more than 200 tanks in the army. By the time of concentration due to the additional staffing of 6 TA SS can have up to 400-500 tanks ... "

However, on February 21, 1945, I. I. Ilyichev sent an urgent special report to I. V. Stalin, N. A. Bulganinui, A. I. Antonov, the data of which contradicted the materials that had been received from the American general the day before. J. R. Dean, for it turned out that "the entire 6th SS Panzer Army is heading for Hungary."

In support of this conclusion, the head of the GRU cited the following evidence:

"... On February 2, 1945, the commander of the Southern Army Group received from Berlin an order to supply the 2nd SS Panzer Corps, and a copy of the order was sent to the commander of the 6th SS Panzer Army, Colonel General Sepp Dietrich;

- the operational department of the SS troops, in its order of February 8, 1945, indicated that the areas of concentration of goods for | the tank corps (which includes | and 12 tank divisions) are Vienna and Gänzerndorf (35 km northeast of Vienna);

— On February 9, 1945, the operational department of the SS troops gave the order to send two officers through Vienna to reconnaissance units | and 9 SS Panzer divisions;

- On February 9, 1945, the commander of the Southern Army Group gave the order - under pain of death, to keep in absolute secrecy everything related to the "rest and replenishment group" (meaning the 6th SS Panzer Army consisting of 1, 2, 3 and 12 tank divisions SS).

The location of this group should not be shown on any maps..."

Further, I. I. Ilyichev reported that "the German High Command (OKW), in an order dated February 10, 1945, indicated to the commander of the German troops stationed on the southern sector of the Soviet-German front,

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that for operations in southern Hungary, the transfer of part of the forces from Croatia (Croatia. - B.S.) will be required. In this regard, some local offensive operations in Croatia must be suspended and put on the defensive... artillery division, which will be withdrawn from the subordination of Army Group F.

This information about the transfer of the 6th SS Panzer Army to Hungary by Soviet military intelligence officers was received through Lieutenant Colonel Kozlov from the British source "X". It is not entirely clear whether this was someone of the famous "Cambridge Five" or an official representative of British intelligence. This information was based on the interception of German

reports, because the British experts were able to simulate the German cipher machine and read the German codes.

The head of the Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff, Colonel-General F.T. Kuznetsov, immediately received the task of clarifying and verifying the information of the British source, as well as organizing operational reconnaissance in areas of possible appearance of formations of the 6th SS Panzer Army.

In turn, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command sent instructions to the commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front F.I. Tolbukhin: without stopping the preparation of an offensive operation on Vienna, take measures to repel a possible enemy counterattack.

By that time, formations of the 6th SS Panzer Army had already appeared against his front, so the information from the center was somewhat outdated.

Hausser describes the concept of Operation Spring Awakening as follows: "The Russians were in front of Army Group South west of the Danube: the front line made a large deep ledge from the Drava to the western edge of Lake Balaton - at a narrow passage between this lake and Lake Velence - then, jutting out to the west, up to the mountain scale of Vertesh — then in an arc open to the west to the Danube near Gron. North of the Danube, the Russians held a bridgehead west of the Gron River. against them

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were involved: south of Lake Balaton - the 2nd Panzer Army, immediately to the left of it the 6th Army of General Herman Balk, on the Danube - the 1st Hungarian Army, to the north of it - the 8th Army.

It was necessary to find a place in this battle formation for the 6th SS Panzer Army. Its task was to destroy the Russian forces west of the Danube, transfer our line of defense forward to the line of the river in order to free up reserves for a decisive battle. `

In Hausser's presentation, the final goal of the offensive at Balaton looks rather absurd. Why undertake an offensive in order to free up reserves for operations in the Berlin direction as a result. Wouldn't it be easier to immediately throw the 6th SS Panzer Army near Berlin. And where is the guarantee that the Russians will calmly wait until Sepp Dietrich's army is done with the Soviet troops in Hungary! After all, they can go on the offensive against the capital of the Reich at any moment. But everything becomes logical if we assume that Hitler, if successful, was going to leave the 6th SS Panzer Army in the south, and then transfer additional troops there and join them together with the imperial government in order to defend to the last in the Alpine fortresses." |

Hausser characterizes the composition of the 6th SS Panzer Army as follows: "The army initially consisted of the 1st SS Panzer Corps with the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, Hitler Youth, Reich and Hohenstaufen divisions. All of them were disguised as training units. This disguise became superfluous when, from 17 to 22 February, units of the 1st SS Panzer Corps north of the Danube were used in the sector of the 8th Army to destroy the Soviet bridgehead on the Gron. The consequence of this was the regrouping of the enemy, who significantly strengthened his grouping south of Budapest.

Attack on the Soviet foothold on the Gron | The SS corps of Gruppenführer Hermann Otto Priss, in cooperation with other Wehrmacht formations, began on February 18 and was liquidated by February 25. The Priss Corps lost about 3 thousand people killed and wounded. The losses of the Soviet troops thrown from the bridgehead were much greater.

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Thus, by February 21, when intelligence reports arrived from England, the Soviet command already knew for sure that the 6th SS Panzer Army was in Hungary. The Germans sacrificed surprise in order to liquidate the dangerous Soviet foothold and thus rule out the possibility of an immediate Soviet attack on Vienna.

According to Hausser, "the army headquarters resisted the plan, according to which the army was to advance from a narrow passage north of Lake Balaton in a southeasterly direction, and repeatedly offered alternatives. But, unfortunately, the plan of the Army Group Headquarters, supported by the OKW, won out in this dispute. The weather and terrain did not favor the operation. More | March, the territory, which was to be attacked, was flooded. Despite this, the OKW insisted on the old start date for the offensive, 6 March. The target of the offensive was Dunafeldvar on the Danube.

The 6th SS Panzer Army consisted of:

- a cavalry corps with two or three cavalry divisions;
- G of the SS Panzer Corps with the 1st "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler") and the 12th ("Hitler Youth") SS Panzer Divisions;
- SS Panzer Corps with the 2nd ("Reich") and 9th ("Hohenstaufen") SS Panzer Divisions, and later with the 44th Wehrmacht Grenadier Division "Hoch-und-Deutschmeister";
- Sh tank corps of the Wehrmacht General Herman Breit with two tank divisions. There were no reserves.

From the air, the offensive was supported by the 4th Air Fleet, which, according to Soviet estimates, had up to 850 aircraft on paper, but extremely limited fuel supplies.

Here is what S. M. Shtemenko, former Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff, recalled about the situation that preceded the second Battle of Balaton: preparation and conduct of the Vienna Offensive. The main role in it was assigned to the troops of R. Ya. Malinovsky. Their main forces were to advance north of the Danube, where

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the enemy, according to scouts, did not have tanks, and his defense relied mainly on infantry. The troops of F. I. Tolbukhin, who were operating to the south, were opposed, according to intelligence, by seven tank divisions. Initially, these troops were assigned a modest task: to assist their neighbor on the right, the 2nd Ukrainian Front. Some changes were made in the composition of the fronts due to the mutual transfer of troops. At the disposal of R.Ya. Malinovsky (to the Szolnok area) the strong 9th Guards Army of General V.V. Glagolev was sent from the Stavka reserve. |-I Bulgarian army, subordinated to F. I. Tolbukhin, received the task to ensure the operation of the front from the south, operating along the northern bank of the Drava.

The start of the offensive was scheduled for March 15.

As always happens in a war, the enemy tried to direct the course of hostilities in his own way, to create a favorable turn in the situation for himself, to defeat the Soviet troops in Hungary, to push them back across the Danube and prevent them from reaching the southern borders of Germany.

On the day when the instructions of the Headquarters went to the troops, the fascist German command moved large forces of tanks in the zone of R. Ya. Malinovsky's troops. The strike was directed from the Komarno region along the northern bank of the Danube against the 7th Guards Army of General M.S. The guardsmen stubbornly resisted for several days, but the enemy nevertheless forced them to retreat to the eastern bank of the Gron.

During the fighting, it was possible to establish that one of the tank corps of the 6th SS Panzer Army, which had previously fought in the west and was known as the best shock formation of the Nazi troops, was operating near Komarno. It was commanded by General Sepp Dietrich - the favorite of the Fuhrer himself. The armament of this army consisted of heavy tanks "panther", "tiger" and "royal tiger".

The appearance of the 6th SS Panzer Army on our front was a very serious new element of the situation. No one expected her here, since our allies specially

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warned Headquarters that this army was on the Western Front. Obviously, the regrouping of the army to the east was connected with some especially important plan of the enemy. This is how we regarded the intelligence information received from the 2nd Ukrainian Front, but for the time being we could not find out what goals the Nazi command pursued.

Using only part of the forces of the 6th SS Panzer Army against the troops of General M.S. Shumilov, the enemy acted recklessly. True, he deprived us of an advantageous starting point for an attack on Vienna, which was the bridgehead behind Hron, but he himself lost the most important success factor - surprise. Our attention was drawn to the tank armada, and this ultimately made it possible to determine the intentions and plans of the German command. Soviet intelligence, using various methods, tirelessly obtained new information about the enemy.

Purposeful reconnaissance work made it possible to gradually reveal that a very large grouping of German forces and equipment, the core of which were tanks, was concentrated southwest of Budapest in the area of Lake Balaton. Here, as it became known later, there were 31 divisions (of which 11 were tank divisions) and some other troops. Their total number exceeded 430 thousand soldiers and officers. They were armed with almost 900 tanks and assault guns, over 5600 guns and mortars, 850 aircraft. Such a strong enemy grouping could be concentrated and intended, most likely, for a counteroffensive.

The Headquarters immediately ordered the General Staff to warn the troops and closely monitor the enemy. But preparations for the attack on Vienna continued at full speed.

Gradually, the enemy's plan was also revealed. On the map of the scouts lay the probable directions of his strikes. The main one is from the border between the interlake Velence and Balaton to the southeast, in order to cut the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front and go to the Danube by the shortest route (30 km). Here the offensive of the main forces of the 6th SS Panzer Army and the 6th Field Army was expected. The 26th Army of General N. A. Hagen opposed the enemy.

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Auxiliary strikes were supposed: one - from the Nagykanizhy region to the east by the forces of the 2nd Panzer Army in order to defeat the 57th Army of General M. N. Sharokhin; the other - part of the forces of Army Group "F" from the southern bank of the Danube against the [1st Bulgarian Army of General V. Stoychev. The directions of the auxiliary attacks converged with the direction of the main attack in the area of Szekszard.

Now the question of what goals the enemy could pursue was gradually becoming clearer. After the loss of Budapest, the most obvious was the desire of the Nazi command to retain the last large oil fields in Hungary and preserve the Vienna industrial region, from which various weapons, including tanks, aircraft, and ammunition, were still coming. It was also possible that fascist Germany would move the center of resistance to the mountainous regions of Austria and Czechoslovakia. This territory was the most convenient for defense. Besides, if resistance turns out to be impossible, it will be possible to capitulate here by the entrusted-Americans, and not to the Red Army. The concentration of the 6th Panzer Army in the Balaton region could serve all these purposes.

From everything it was clear that the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front were facing great trials, and they were carefully preparing for them. The headquarters ordered the creation of a deep defense, especially strong in anti-tank terms. By the beginning of active enemy operations, the 3rd Ukrainian Front had about 400 thousand soldiers and officers, 400 tanks and self-propelled artillery installations, almost 7 thousand guns and mortars, over 950 aircraft. Thus, with equal numbers, the enemy had more than double superiority in tanks and

assault guns, but was inferior to us by artillery and aviation. All this allowed the Headquarters to make a decision on a defensive operation with confidence."

Here, Sergei Matveevich significantly reduced the number of Soviet troops. As we will see later, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front had 465,000 soldiers by the beginning of the fighting.

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soldiers and officers. But Shtemenko defined the enemy's plan correctly.

Meanwhile, on February 20, the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front received an order from the Headquarters, leaving no preparations for an attack on Vienna, to pay special attention to anti-tank defense in case of a possible enemy counterattack with the participation of the 6th SS Panzer Army. This duality of the assigned task, when it was necessary to prepare both for the offensive and for defense at the same time, had a negative impact on the ability of the front troops to repel an enemy strike. In anticipation of an enemy offensive, F.I. Tolbukhin held a meeting of the senior staff of the headquarters of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, at which he demanded that Major General A.S. Rogov to find out the most likely directions of a possible enemy counteroffensive. It was soon established that the most probable direction of the German offensive was north of Szekesfehervar towards Budapest and between lakes Velence and Balaton on Dunapengel. Here the enemy was 25-30 km from the Danube, and his strikes for the units of the 3rd Ukrainian Front could be the most dangerous.

Tolbukhin ordered to concentrate the efforts of the troops in the defense zones of the 4th Guards Army of General Zakharov and the 26th Army of General Hagen. Each of the armies was given 1] anti-tank regiments of the RVGK. The 27th Army of General S.G. Trofimenko was located in the second echelon of the front behind the junctions of the 4th Guards and 26th armies. In total, taking into account the artillery of the 27th Army, 50 artillery and 3 mortar regiments, as well as 4 cannon brigades of the RVGK, were concentrated in this direction.

In the zone of the 4th Guards Army, Lieutenant General N. D. Zakhvataev, who replaced G. F. Zakharov, and the 26th Army, Lieutenant General N. A. Gagen, who were defending in the first echelon in the direction of the probable main attack of the enemy, more than 90 percent of the entire artillery reserve of the Supreme High Command, transferred to the 2nd order of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, was concentrated. In the area of the front 'paradise, it was planned to create a continuous zone of multilayer

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gun-mortar fire. But by the beginning of the German offensive, they did not have time to do this.

On the other hand, company anti-tank strongholds were equipped with 3-5 guns and 4-6 anti-tank rifles, battalion anti-tank units, anti-tank units. high areas and mobile artillery anti-tank reserves of regiments, divisions, corps and armies. The battalion knots were reinforced with individual tanks and self-propelled artillery mounts. Anti-tank areas, which had from 12 to 24 guns, were organized in threatened tank-dangerous directions, as well as at the junctions and flanks of formations. About 30 thousand anti-tank mines were used in the minefields.

In addition to the 4th Guards and the 26th, in the first echelon of the front was the 1st Bulgarian army of General Stoychev and the 57th army of General Sharokhin. The reserve of the front included the 1st Guards Mechanized Corps, the 18th and 23rd Tank Corps, and the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps. Together they numbered 142 tanks, of which 12 needed repairs. The 23rd Tank Corps was reinforced by the 207th Self-Propelled Artillery Brigade with 63 SU-100s, and the 18th Tank Corps was reinforced by the 208th Self-Propelled Artillery Brigade with 65 SU-100s. The 23rd tank corps was located in the area of Lovashveren, the 18th tank corps was located in the area of Adoni, Sharashd, the 1st guards mechanized corps was located in the area of Karachoni, Dunafeldvar, which was the target of the German offensive, and the 5th guards Cavalry Corps - in the area of Alap, Shimontarinia, Pintsehel. The commanders were ordered to pay special attention to the organization of anti-tank defense, to create in the troops Y

strong anti-tank reserves and mobile obstacle detachments. The 3rd Ukrainian Front had 5535 guns and mortars, of which 2976 could be used to fight with tanks.

The greatest density of defense was at the turn of Gant - Lake Velence. Here the division had, on average, a defensive section of 3.3 km, and 24.7 guns per 1 km of the front.

Along the entire front of the alleged German offensive, an average of 700-750 missiles were installed per 1 kilometer.

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anti-tank and 600-690 anti-personnel mines. Mobile barrier detachments on captured armored personnel carriers were organized.

A few days before the start of the offensive, on March 2, Sepp Dietrich met with Joseph Goebbels. The Reich Minister of Propaganda wrote in his diary: "In a conversation with me, Sepp Dietrich explains to me the immediate tasks assigned to him by the Führer. He hopes that in six days he will be able to start the operations already often mentioned here in the region of Hungary. He expects that these operations will last approximately 10-12 days. If everything goes well, you can expect a huge success. And then, as he believes, in 14 days he will be ready for further operations in Germany. Until now, it has also been possible to conceal from the enemy the deployment of the 6th Panzer Army on Hungarian territory; at least as long as there is no reason to talk about taking countermeasures by him. Therefore, on the whole, it can be expected that at the end of March larger operations will become possible in East German territory as well. But until that time, we will have to go through great difficulties.

In his statements, Dietrich criticizes the Führer's measures rather frankly. He complains that the Führer gives too little freedom to his military comrades-in-arms, and this has already supposedly led to the fact that now the Führer even decides the question of putting into action each individual company. But Dietrich has no right to judge this. The Führer cannot rely on his military advisers. They deceived and let him down so often that now he has to deal with each unit. Thank God that he is doing this, otherwise things would be even worse.

It is completely incomprehensible how Dietrich could have hoped for the sudden appearance of his army in Hungary at the beginning of March, since his divisions had already fought for the Gronskey bridgehead two weeks before the conversation with the Reich Minister of Propaganda. Yes, and dreams of defeating the Soviet troops west of the Danube in 10-12 days smack of obvious Manilovism.

According to the results of the offensive, on March 21, Goebbels stated with regret in a conversation with Hitler that "Sepp Diet

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rich also does not belong to the first class. He is a good military commander, but by no means a strategist. Absolutely correct definition! Another thing is that a real strategist like Manstein would hardly have been able to do anything in those conditions.

The leaders of the Third Reich placed great, obviously exaggerated hopes on the offensive in the Balaton region. On March 5, Goebbels recorded his conversation with Hitler in his diary: "March 6, next Tuesday, our offensive in Hungary begins. The Führer fears that the enemy has already learned about the concentration of our troops in this area and has accordingly prepared for the battalion. Nevertheless, he hopes that our offensive will be a complete success. After all, here we have selected troops ready for the offensive under the command of Sepp Dietrich.

The General Staff is now aware of the need for our strike in Hungary, although up to now it has strongly opposed the idea that we should first be active here. But now before

most of all in connection with the problem of providing gasoline, he realized that we must under all circumstances hold out in Hungary if we do not want to completely abandon the conduct of motorized warfare. The Führer is right when he says that Stalin has a number of outstanding military leaders, but not a single brilliant strategist; for if he had it, then the Soviet blow would have been delivered, for example, not to the Pobaranuvsky bridgehead, but in Hungary. If we were deprived of Hungarian and Austrian oil, then we would be completely incapable of the counter-offensive that we are planning in the east.

Hitler was far more astute than Dietrich, and he knew that by the beginning of March, the Soviets would certainly know about the presence of the 6th SS Panzer Army in Hungary, if only because two of its divisions participated in the liquidation of the Gronske bridgehead. The Führer also emphasized that Hungary was the only remaining source of gasoline for the Reich. With the loss of Western Hungary and the adjoining regions of Austria, resistance could only last a few weeks, until the fuel supply ran out. In the event of the loss of the last oil refineries, it will be impossible to defend either Berlin or the Alpine Fortress for a long time.

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On March 6, the day the offensive began in Hungary, Goebbels wrote in his diary: "It would be urgently necessary to achieve success again at least in one place. I hope that this will happen in Hungary in the coming days." But he immediately made a reservation: "We are now preparing our major counterattack in Pomerania. I hope it can be applied soon. On Tuesday our offensive in Hungary is expected. If both operations were successful, then it would, of course, be great. But the hopes that both of them can come true would perhaps be too great. In reality, neither of the two counterattacks produced any significant results. But even if all the divisions destined for both counterattacks were used only for one of them, for example, in Hungary, this would still not lead to a turning point.

Hausser recalled: "The offensive from the area between lakes Velence and Balaton began early in the morning on March 6 without artillery preparation and without any air support.

The territory was divided into two parts by a wide canal and swamps west of the Shtulweisenburg (Szekesfehervar)-Tsetse highway. The main direction of impact was on the right side. The features of the terrain made it possible to use only infantry here. Tanks and artillery could operate only along roads and in settlements.

Despite this, the advancing west of the canal advanced to the Shio and Shimontorinia canal, while to the east the Russians fiercely held every inch of the earth. Here Guy and the SS Panzer Corps managed to advance only slightly. The commander of the Das Reich division, Gruppenführer Werner Ostendorf, was seriously wounded (this happened on March 9. - RB.S.) and subsequently died.

This offensive was planned as a concentric one: units of the Balkan Army Group were to strike from the Drava in a northerly direction, the 2nd Panzer Army south of Lake Balaton — in an easterly direction; the 16th Panzergrenadier division.

North of Lake Velence on the right flank of Balck's army

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the SS Gille corps with the 3rd and 5th SS divisions participated in heavy defensive battles. Everything happened as it should have happened: a turning point occurred in the battle, two days after the start of the offensive, strong blows were dealt along the front of Balck's army from Lake Velence to the Danube, their main power fell on the area north of Shtulweisenburg (Szekesfehervar). The troops adjacent to the left of Balk's army were under threat. The 6th SS Army immediately stopped the offensive and began a forced retreat.

Gille's corps was able to prevent the enemy's breakthrough in a courageous defensive battle, which, unfortunately, failed to the north of it, where the Hungarians defended Vertesi. Thus, strong advanced Russian tank detachments found themselves on the Shtulweisenburg-Mohr road, the left flank of Gille's corps was surrounded.

By this time, the Reich division under the command of Standartenführer Rudolf Lehmann was already moving through the Veszprem to intercept the enemy west of Kischber and free the rear of the 6th SS Panzer Army.

The army headquarters planned to send troops to the rear guard positions, approximately from Veszprem to the Danube. While he directed the withdrawal of troops and their passage through the territory between the lakes, the army group ordered the armies of Dietrich and Balck to change their area of responsibility. The first was to take command of the front from the area north of Veszprem to the Danube over the Hungarian formations. In the south, Balk commanded, who one by one handed over the units vacated here to Dietrich to the north. These maneuvers, when viewed today, seem inexplicable. They can only be seen as a sign of mistrust. The liberated units were individually thrown against the Russians. Only the SS division "Das Reich" acted as a single unit and completed its task.

But in this way it was impossible to protect either the rear-guard positions east of the Pope, or the Shabriz Canal, or Raab. Soviet troops were already everywhere to the west of these positions. Now it was no longer possible to stop: without communication with others

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troops [and the Itankovye SS corps fought back to the border. Further retreat - as once in Normandy - was forbidden from above. For the sake of historical truth, it is worth mentioning here that Adolf Hitler, not fully understanding the facts, ordered the cuff tapes to be taken away from the SS divisions. However, this order was not transmitted through the instance.”

On the night of March 6, suddenly, without artillery preparation, German troops crossed the Drava and attacked units of the 3rd Yugoslav and 1st Bulgarian armies. The first strike by the forces of the three divisions of Army Group F came from the line of the Drava River in the direction of Mohacs. German troops crossed the Drava in the area of Dolni-Mikholyats and Valpovo. Parts of the Bulgarian and Yugoslav armies were pushed back from the river. The Germans captured a small foothold on the northern bank of the Drava. If the offensive continued, the enemy could reach the crossings on the Danube and the rear of the 57th Army. Therefore, Golbuhin ordered to accelerate the transfer of the 133rd Rifle Corps to the 57th Army and, having organized its counterattack in cooperation with the Bulgarian and Yugoslav troops, restore the defense along the Drava. The counterattack was not successful, but the further advance of the Germans in this area was stopped. However, they did not intend to introduce large forces here. The strike on the Drava was of an auxiliary nature and was intended to divert the attention and forces of the Soviet command from the main offensive in the inter-lake region. This strike achieved its goal, since the 133rd Rifle Corps was transferred to the 57th Army.

The Germans delivered the second distracting strike at 07:00 on March 6, after a 55-minute artillery preparation, by the forces of the 2nd Panzer Army in the direction of Kaposvár. They penetrated in a narrow sector of the front into the defenses of the 57th Army to a depth of up to 5 km. Further advance of the enemy in this direction was stopped by counterattacks of the second echelons of divisions and powerful artillery fire.

At 08:45, the attack began on the main direction between lakes Velence and Balaton. If Soviet sources claim that it was preceded by a powerful

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hour-long artillery preparation, Hausser and other German sources insist that there was no artillery or air preparation before the offensive. The attack was carried out by the 1st

the SS Panzer Division Adolf Hitler, the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitler Youth and the Hungarian 25th Infantry Division. More than 300 tanks and assault guns took part in the offensive. Some of them, together with the infantry, made their way at the junction of the 4th Guards and 26th Armies and by the end of the day wedged into the positions of the 30th Rifle Corps to a depth of 3-4 kilometers. There was a threat of a breakthrough of the main line of the Soviet defense.

Not surprisingly, the German offensive achieved its greatest success west of the Sharviz Canal. There, between Lake Balaton and the canal, where the left-flank formations of the 26th Army were defending, the density of the Soviet defense was the weakest. The division accounted for a defense sector of 4.7 km, and a kilometer of the front accounted for only 9.7 guns. In the rear of the defenders, the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps was located here. The command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front considered this area not suitable for the operations of large groups of tanks.

According to the reports of the Soviet troops, up to 600 German tanks were attacked in the inter-lake area, which significantly exceeded their true number. The 1st and 12th SS divisions moved quickly along the western bank of the Sharviz Canal in the direction of Tsetse. The 356th Infantry and 23rd Panzer Divisions of the Wehrmacht advanced along the eastern bank of the canal to Sharkerestur and Sharashd with much greater difficulty. Here they advanced only 2-3 km and were stopped by concentrated artillery fire. But on the western bank of the canal, German tank units, skillfully finding passages between impassable terrain, quickly moved forward. Particularly fierce battles were fought for large settlements and highways. The Soviet infantry again, as in January, often retreated under the onslaught of tanks, leaving the gunners to their fate.

By the end of the day on March 6, units of the 6th SS Panzer Army captured the town of Sheregelesh, located at the junction of the 4th Guards

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Deyskoy and 26th armies. This was due to the fact that the enemy took parts of the 1st Guards fortified area by surprise, as well as the poor security of its junction with the 30th Rifle Corps. The two armies were never able to establish cooperation here. First, the Germans pressed the 4th Guards fortified area, which retreated and opened the right flank of the 155th Infantry Division. Having hit him, the German motorized infantry broke into Sheregelesh. Soviet counterattacks, launched by one of the rifle regiments of the 155th division and the 110th tank brigade, ended in failure.

Having taken possession of Sheregelesh at 10 o'clock in the morning, the Germans penetrated the Soviet defenses in a narrow sector to a depth of 3-4 km, and to the west of the canal Sharviz advanced only 1-1.5 km. In other areas, German enemy attacks were successfully repelled.

Meanwhile, two brigades of the 18th Panzer Corps occupied a prepared line east and south of Sheregelesh. A tank regiment from the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps occupied a previously prepared line in the Sharkerestur area. One division of the 27th Army was advanced to the second line of defense east of Sheregelesh.

On March 7, to strengthen the defense, at the direction of the front commander, units of three divisions of the 27th Army advanced to the second line south of Lake Velence. The maneuver was carried out extensively by artillery units. During two days of fighting, three anti-tank artillery regiments were transferred from the front reserve and from the non-attacked sectors of the 4th Guards Army to the area south of Lake Velence. In connection with the penetration of enemy troops into the defenses west of the Sharviz Canal, the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps took up defensive positions along the eastern bank of the Sharviz Canal and along the southern bank of the Yelusha and Kaposh Canals. The 33rd Rifle Corps began advancing to the right bank of the Danube.

After the fall of Sheregelesh, the flank of the 155th Infantry Division was threatened. She had to deploy one rifle regiment to the north and reinforce it with IPTAP from the reserve of the corps.

The 436th Rifle Regiment was ordered to withdraw and occupy

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defense in third position. The artillery of the corps stopped the further advance of the Germans. On the left flank of the corps, enemy tanks broke into the main zone of the 68th Guards Rifle Division. Parts of the division, having turned their front to the west, on the night of March 8, retreated to the eastern bank of the Sharviz Canal. However, the Germans could not go further.

To the west of the Sharviz Canal, formations of the 135th Rifle Corps were unable to hold their positions, and the enemy tank divisions broke through the second line of defense, pushing the troops of the 26th Army in the direction of Shimontornia.

To stop the enemy, a number of urgent measures were taken. The defense of the section from Lake Velence to the Sharviz Canal was entrusted to the 27th Army, to which the 30th Rifle Corps (155th, 36th Guards, 21st and 68th Guards Rifle Divisions) and 206th rifle division from the 33rd rifle corps. The 1st Guards Mechanized, 18th and 23rd Tank Corps were transferred to the operational subordination of the army. An artillery maneuver was carried out south of Lake Velence, as a result of which the density of artillery increased significantly.

On the morning of March 10, south of Lake Velence, the German 3rd Panzer Corps was driven into battle. He managed to break through the main strip and wedge into our defenses south of Lake Velence to a depth of 10 km. To the west of the Sharviz canal, the Germans reached the Yelusha and Kaposh canals, where they were stopped by artillery fire.

On the morning of March 7, fierce fighting broke out in the Kalosa area. 1964, 1965 and 1966 ITPAPS distinguished themselves here. As usual, left without cover by the retreating infantry, they courageously held back the onslaught of German tanks. When several tanks were knocked out, the Germans began to fire at the gunners with assault guns from long distances. Then they were attacked by infantry. On March 7, three regiments, according to their reports, knocked out and burned 44 tanks and 5 armored personnel carriers, losing 32 guns, 3 tractors and 4 off-road trucks. After that, the 1965th and 1966th regiments were withdrawn to the rear for resupply, and the 1964th again

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was thrown into battle at Sharsentagoth. Two divisions of captured assault guns were pulled there, which had 8 150-mm assault guns and 8 anti-aircraft 88-mm assault guns. In the battle on March 9, these divisions lost all military equipment. And on March 12, near Enying, a battalion of captured tanks was thrown into battle, which had 4 "tigers" and 7 "panthers", as well as 2 assault 75-mm guns. This battalion was not lucky. Even on the way to the battlefield, he was attacked by Soviet attack aircraft, who did not see the stars and red flags on the turrets of captured tanks. As a result, two cars were set on fire, and five, escaping from "friendly fire", ran off the road and got stuck in the mud. Subsequently, the Germans pulled out the stuck vehicles and used them to advance towards the Tsetse-Kapos Canal line on March 13-15. Later, in this area, the Soviet trophy team discovered a "panther" abandoned by the Germans with a star covered with plywood - a thrice captured tank. On March 13, the 23rd Panzer Division was transferred to the Kaposh Canal from the Abo, Sharashd area, but it was never able to cross the line of the Yelusha-Kapos Canals. By noon on March 15, the German offensive here finally stopped.

On the right flank of the 26th Army, the SS divisions failed to achieve noticeable success in the first two days of the offensive. Here, north and east of Sheregelesh, the 170th Tank Brigade of the 18th Tank Corps, the 3rd Guards Airborne Division and the 1016th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment successfully defended themselves.

On March 7, Dietrich's army advanced only 2-5 kilometers. The next day, March 8, army reserves were brought into battle - the 2nd and 9th SS Panzer Divisions, which attacked the positions of the 26th Army. By the end of the day they had inflicted heavy losses on the 63rd Cavalry Division in the eastern

the bank of the Sharviz Canal. The 1068th and 1922nd self-propelled artillery regiments, as well as a large number of attack aircraft, were hastily thrown to her aid. The 236th Rifle Division, the 60th Tank Regiment, and the 1896th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment of the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps were additionally brought into action. The German advance was

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updated. However, the very next day, the Soviet troops were forced to retreat.

By March 9, all the army and front reserves of the 3rd Ukrainian Front were used up, and the Headquarters forbade using the 9th Guards Army to repel an enemy strike. By the end of the day, German tanks and infantry had knocked down units of the 110th Tank Brigade from an important height of 159.0, but the further advance of the enemy was stopped due to darkness.

On March 10, having thrown into battle units of the 1st and 3rd Panzer Divisions that had not been used before, the command of the 6th SS Panzer Army struck a new blow on a narrow sector of the front. He was met by the regiments of the 209th self-propelled artillery brigade and four anti-tank regiments transferred from the Stavka reserve. The density of artillery in the area of the German attack was increased to 49 guns per 1 km of the front. On that day, according to a report from the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, the enemy lost 81 tanks and assault guns, 25 armored personnel carriers and armored vehicles, 36 guns and mortars, 21 aircraft, and up to 3,500 soldiers and officers.

On March 14, German troops tried to break through along the shores of Lake Velence. Here they were opposed by the 23rd Tank Corps, supported by the SU-100 brigade. They counterattacked the enemy, but suffered heavy losses, since the counterattacks were carried out without proper reconnaissance and preparation. However, our tankers were able not only to stop the enemy tanks, but also in places to push them back by 1-3 km.

Sepp Dietrich recalled: "My left flank (SS Panzer Corps) did not achieve any noticeable success. The enemy was well fortified on the western bank of the Danube; swampy terrain, impassable for tanks, prevented our advance. The attack bogged down in the area of Sharashd and Sharkerestur. The center - the first tank corps and cavalry divisions - reported success, but when the tanks began to develop it, they found themselves in impassable terrain. It was assumed that the marshes would freeze, as General von Weehler had promised, and become passable. In fact, dampness and swamps were everywhere. To ensure surprise, I

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refused to conduct preliminary reconnaissance of the area. Now 132 tanks are stuck in the mud, and 15 "royal tigers" plunged up the tower. Only the infantry could continue the attack, and their losses were great.

In this case, the former commander of the 6th SS Panzer Army out of forgetfulness or deliberately sinned against the truth. The grouping, stopped in the Sharashd-Sharkerestur area, was just advancing along relatively passable terrain for tanks, and was stopped not by swamps, but by a fortress of dense Soviet defense. It is also unclear why Dietrich refused to reconnoitre the area. After all, after the 1st SS Panzer Corps appeared in the middle of February in the battles for the Gronskey bridgehead, there was no need to talk about any suddenness of the appearance of its army in Hungary. In essence, Dietrich made the same mistake as Rotmistrov near Prokhorovka when he went on the offensive without reconnaissance.

Goebbels described in his diary the first day of the German offensive at Balaton: "The army of Sepp Dietrich launched a major offensive in Hungary. It is not yet possible to make any predictions. The first reports do not say anything, except that our troops met with very strong resistance and therefore did not advance very far on the first day. The enemy is already taking countermeasures, primarily by attacking heavily from the air.

The following day, the Reich Minister for Propaganda noted with optimism that "in Hungary, several strong local attacks between Balaton and the Drava gave good results, and our troops advanced in the Kaposvár area about six to eight kilometers towards Osijek. At the same time, from the south, from the Virovitizar (Virovititsy) region through the Drava to the north, an advance of six to eight kilometers was also noted (these were auxiliary strikes inflicted by Army Group "HER" against the Yugoslav and Bulgarian armies. - B.S.). In attacks from the eastern part of Balaton, in the area south of Shtulweisenburg (Szekesfehervar), good initial results were also achieved.

However, these local successes have not yet created serious

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threats to Soviet troops. And Goebbels' optimism vanished by the evening of March 7, when it was reported from Hungary that "our troops are meeting exceptionally fierce resistance there. Therefore, they have not yet been able to capture a large space."

On March 9, Goebbels perked up again: "Our offensive continues throughout Hungary. Particularly noticeable are the successes near the Malom canal and southwest of Szekesfehervar... Good news came from Hungary. The 6th Panzer Army managed to penetrate deeply into the enemy defenses. Now an attempt is being made to get behind the rear of the enemy in order to destroy his troops and thereby achieve the collapse of a significant part of his front. The Soviets, of course, are defending themselves with all their might, but I hope that Sepp Dietrich will be able to carry out the Fuhrer's plan.

On March 10, according to Goebbels, events in Hungary developed just as favorably for the Germans: "In Hungary, during the German offensive operations, new local successes were achieved yesterday. Especially gratifying are the developments between Balaton and the Danube, where our offensive continues on a broad front along the Malom Canal. Strong enemy counterattacks on the flanks were repelled... Our attack aircraft in Hungary and on the central sector of the Eastern Front again achieved great success." Surprisingly, the few and starving German aviation in the Battle of Balaton acted more efficiently than the Soviet one, inflicting losses on Soviet tanks and artillery. Goebbels on that day hoped that a decisive success was about to come: "In the east, events are developing so far favorably in Hungary. Our wedge is widened further to the west. Here we can already talk about a breakthrough. We broke through the enemy defenses on a 25-kilometer front and also advanced 25 kilometers in depth. Our wedge has also been expanded in the direction of Lake Balaton, so here too we can talk about a significant initial success."

On March 12, Goebbels was still rejoicing at the success of the 6th SS Panzer Army: "Our offensive in Hungary started well. True, progress is not yet so great,

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to completely perk up. We must wait, perhaps a few more days, to be able to finally evaluate this offensive ... Our offensive in Hungary is yielding slow but sure results. In general, the development of events there can be called favorable, we have made significant progress. We have also moved ahead of Lake Velence, so now we can talk about a really big offensive." The day before, in a conversation with Hitler, Goebbels connected the theme of the successful offensive in Hungary with the atrocities of the Soviet troops in East Germany and Europe: "I report in detail to the Führer about my impressions of my trip to Lauban - B. S.), describing in detail the horrors that he himself encountered there. The Führer believes that from now on we must widely propagate the idea of revenge on the Soviets. We must now throw our offensive forces to the east. Everything is decided in the East. The Soviets must pay with blood for blood; then, perhaps, it will be possible to reason with the Kremlin. Our troops are now obliged to endure and overcome the fear of Bolshevism. If we really go over to a massive offensive, we will succeed, as evidenced by the development of events in Hungary, which the Führer considers

very promising. It remains to be hoped that it will continue to be so in the future. In any case, the Führer believes that the propaganda I have started about the atrocities is absolutely correct and should be carried on further. During the same conversation with Goebbels, Hitler outlined the German goals in the East, within which the offensives in Hungary and Pomerania were undertaken: "So our goal should have been to drive the Soviets in the east back, inflicting the heaviest losses in manpower and equipment. Then the Kremlin, perhaps, would have shown more compliance towards us. A separate peace with him would, of course, radically change the military situation. Naturally, this would not have been the achievement of our goals in 1941, but the Führer still hopes to achieve the division of Poland, annex Hungary and Croatia to the German sphere of influence and get a free hand to conduct operations on west.

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Such a goal is certainly worth the effort. Ending the war in the east and freeing up your hands to start operations in the west—what a great idea! Therefore, the Führer also believes that revenge against the East and hatred against the West should be preached. After all, it was the West that caused this war and brought it to such terrible proportions. To him we owe our ruined cities and cultural monuments lying in ruins. And if the Anglo-Americans could be driven back, with cover from the east, then, no doubt, the goal would be achieved, which is to force England out of Europe for all time as a disturber of the peace.

Goebbels was delighted. It seems that the Führer's speech had a magical effect on him and made him believe in the possibility of success in the most hopeless circumstances. The Reich Minister wrote in his diary: "The program presented to me here by the Führer is grandiose and convincing. It lacks so far the opportunity for implementation. This possibility must first be created by our soldiers in the east. Several impressive victories are needed as a prerequisite for its implementation; and, judging by the current situation, they are probably achievable. For this, everything must be done. For this we must work, for this we must fight, and for this we must by all means raise the morale of our people to its former level."

Most likely, Hitler put forward such projects only to encourage his own entourage. It is unlikely that he himself believed in their reality.

But the situation that took shape in Hungary on March 12 is already beginning to worry Goebbels. He wrote in his diary: "In Hungary, as a result of our attacks, only partial and insignificant progress has been made. The Soviets strengthened their positions due to the approach of the Bulgarian and Romanian units. The only consolation for the Reichsminister was that in Hungary and on the Central Sector of the Front the Luftwaffe allegedly shot down 65 enemy planes.

But by the end of the day, under the influence of new reports, optimism again prevailed: "As for the east, it is very encouraging

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developments in Hungary. We crossed the Shio River and created two bridgeheads on the other side. This is satisfactory news. Now we must try to finally put the enemy to flight. We also succeeded in breaking through in the upper reaches, so from here, obviously, we can move on. However, the Minister of Propaganda was supposed to be an optimist according to his position.

On March 13, the situation did not seem to inspire much anxiety. Goebbels writes: "Significant progress has been made in Hungary southeast of Lake Balaton. Two bridgeheads have been created across the Shio River. Southeast of Balaton, Aba's advance was also noted. East of Szekesfehervar, our tank column, led by the "Tigers", advanced as a result of the attack about eight kilometers in an easterly direction. But by the evening it was sobering. Describing the situation at that moment, Goebbels wrote in his diary: "In Hungary, our troops achieved only insignificant success. I'm getting

the impression that our advance had stalled, which could have had fatal consequences. Sepp Dietrich has succeeded in establishing one foothold across the river Shio, but it remains a big question whether he will be able to launch further operations from it. In Stavka, at least, express the opinion that now it would be necessary to attack. But there is still no consistency in operations."

Already on March 14, the German offensive actually stopped. Goebbels is forced to state: "In Hungary, numerous attacks on our new positions have been repulsed ... Quite depressing news comes from Hungary. Our offensive there, as it seems, cannot develop. Our divisions are stuck in Soviet defensive positions and are now facing significant Soviet counterattacks. Everything seems to be going down the drain. None of our military operations, no matter how well it was prepared, it has not led to success lately. Stalin has every reason to honor, just like movie stars, the Soviet marshals who have shown outstanding military abilities. News of this comes from Moscow, almost reminiscent of the usual

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teas from the life of our Pashas... In Hungary they are now talking about powerful enemy counterattacks against our advancing troops. Anyway, there is no progress now. Both sides are regrouping. But we know what that might mean." Goebbels knew only too well that the retreat of the generals is often called a regrouping.

The last hope flashed on March 15. Goebbels wrote: "In Hungary, we are expanding the front of our attacks with strikes between Kaposvár and the western coast of Lake Balaton, where we, on a front with a length of 20 to 30 kilometers, advanced three to four kilometers through heavily mined terrain (but this was a secondary direction, success on which no longer played a significant role. - B.S.). On the river Shio, we created one bridgehead and defeated several enemy bridgeheads on our bank of this river. On that day, 37 enemy aircraft were shot down in Hungary, including 4 Allied heavy bombers operating from Italy.

In the evening of the same day, Goebbels noted: "Unfortunately, only minor local successes have been achieved in Hungary. There is no need to talk about systematic progress forward. On the contrary, our 6th Army has now crossed over to the defense.

On March 15, the last day of the German offensive, Goebbels wrote: "In Hungary, as a result of the offensive between the western tip of Balaton and Kaposvár, our troops advanced two or three kilometers on a wide front, but in other sectors - in particular, in the area Szekesfehervara - the enemy strongly counterattacked, mainly. zom infantry units. All attacks, with the exception of the penetration into our positions between Szekesfehervar and Felzogalloy, were repelled.

And on March 20, Goebbels acknowledged the success of the Soviet offensive that had taken place the day before: "In Hungary, between Szekesfehervar and Felzogalla, the enemy, acting in the western and northwestern directions, attacked the weak positions of the Hungarian troops on the Vertes mountain range and wedged into them in many places to a depth of 15 to 20 kilometers. Ata

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ki on Mor thwarted. Between Mor and Szekesfehervar the enemy reached the Szekesfehervar-Comorn (Komarno) railway. Our attack south of Balaton was crowned with an advance at Martsali.

Only now Goebbels admitted the obvious: "In Hungary we have completely gone over to the defensive. To the north of Lake Velence, the enemy again managed to move forward a little. There is no more talk about the offensive of our shock army.

The next day, as Goebbels noted, the situation became even more gloomy: "In Hungary, our offensive finally stalled. Here we were forced to go over to the defense, which, in addition, turned out to be extremely weak, which led already to deep penetrations and serious losses. The city of Szekesfehervar passed into the hands of the enemy. True, we are undertaking counterattack after counterattack, but these operations do not bring success.

Here is how S. M. Shtemenko characterized the current situation: "On March 6, the enemy's counteroffensive, which we expected, began, especially powerful in the main direction. The fighting did not stop for nine days and was extremely fierce. Although the Nazi troops had very significant forces, they could not break out to the Danube, despite the fact that sometimes they brought up to 450 tanks into battle on one sector of the front.

The Balaton defensive battle became another example of the greatest courage, unbending stamina and heroism of Soviet soldiers. In the course of the defense in two days - on March 7 - the enemy lost almost 100 tanks and assault guns, during the entire battle (March 6-15) - almost 500! The massive heroism of the soldiers and officers of the 3rd Ukrainian Front dispelled the last hopes of the Nazi command to restore the situation in the center of Europe. Our victory also helped the Anglo-American troops in Italy and helped complete the rout of the invaders in fraternal Yugoslavia.

The firm conviction that the enemy counteroffensive in the area of Lake Balaton would be repulsed did not leave the General Staff and Headquarters for a minute. Here they clearly imagined what heavy battles unfolded in

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the western bank of the Danube and what extraordinary difficulties the Soviet soldiers are overcoming. During the battle, the headquarters reinforced the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front at the expense of the right neighbor. But the Soviet Supreme High Command did not remove from the fronts the task of going over to a decisive offensive after the completion of the defensive battle. It disposed and ready for action fresh forces.

... One cannot forget the anxious days of March 1945. At that time, the Soviet strategic leadership more than once or twice weighed the chances of the enemy under various options for the actions of the troops. They considered the possible conditions and outcome of the struggle, especially in the case of a tough defense on the right bank of the Danube, where our troops were to hold a bridgehead. Here the battle promised to be especially difficult and bloody. Another option was also discussed: to withdraw from the right bank of the Danube to the left, to abandon the bridgehead. In this case, hiding behind a wide water barrier, it was possible to guarantee the holding of positions across the river.

But the question inevitably arose: how to proceed? After all, it was necessary to end the war and bring down the most sensitive blows on the enemy, to advance further to the west. It was then that it became clear that the defense on the right bank of the Danube was much more profitable and more promising than on the left. It would have been immeasurably more difficult to go over to the offensive later: the enemy would also have covered himself with the river. And of course, we would lose time.

The Headquarters and the General Staff assessed all the pros and cons and settled on the fact that the first option should be put into practice - to defend on the right bank of the Danube and immediately after the end of the defensive battle, go on the counteroffensive.

The second question was related to this question - about the 9th Guards Army of General V.V. Glagolev.

On March 9, F. I. Tolbukhin applied by telephone to the Headquarters for permission to use the 9th Guards Army, which had just been transferred to his front, for defensive purposes. He also asked if his troops and, in extreme cases, the headquarters should retreat to the left bank of the Danube so as not to lose control.

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Cape A. I. Antonov were at that time in the office of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. J. V. Stalin listened to the considerations of the commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, hesitated a little and in a flat voice said something like the following:

- Comrade Tolbukhin, if you are thinking of dragging out the war for another five or six months, then, of course, withdraw your troops across the Danube. It will definitely be quieter there. But I doubt that you think so. Therefore, you should defend on the right bank of the river, and you and your headquarters should be there. I am sure that the troops will fulfill their difficult tasks with honor. You just need to manage them well.

Then he expressed the idea of the need to knock out the enemy's tanks during a defensive battle, said that the enemy should not be given time to gain a foothold on the lines he had reached and organize a solid defense.

"Therefore," the Supreme Commander-in-Chief reasoned aloud, "it is necessary to go on the offensive immediately after the enemy is stopped and completely defeat him. This requires significant fresh forces. They will carry over - this is Glagolev's army. Nearby is also the 6th Guards Tank Army of General Kravchenko. So far, she is subordinate to Malinovsky, but, if necessary, she can be transferred to your front. Draw the necessary conclusions from here. - Looking at A. I. Antonov, he added: - The General Staff is on my side.

F. I. Tolbukhin said that he understood the order and hung up.

The General Staff was ordered to confirm the tasks of the fronts with a directive, which we did. The directive stated: "To the commander of the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front in defensive battles, to wear down the enemy's tank group advancing from the Szekesfehervar area, after which, no later than March 15-16 this year. d. the right wing of the front to go on the offensive with the aim of defeating the enemy north of Lake Balaton and developing an attack in the general direction of Papa, Sopron.

The 9th Guards Army should not be drawn into defensive battles, but used to develop a strike and finally defeat the enemy.

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The commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front was ordered north of the Danube to move to a tough defense, and the left flank, that is, where the front was directly adjacent to the strike force of F. I. Tolbukhin's troops, to advance on Győr.

So, speaking in general terms, the Headquarters outlined actions aimed at defeating the main enemy forces in the area of Lake Balaton. Here it was supposed to lay the foundations for the success of the Vienna operation. Note that the preparation of the operation took place in the conditions of an ongoing heavy defensive battle.

As we expected, the enemy forces were completely exhausted, and on March 15 he abandoned the offensive. Now our time has come. On March 16, the troops of F. I. Tolbukhin, reinforced by the 6th Guards Tank Army from the 2nd Ukrainian Front, moved forward. Thus, without an operational pause after the defensive battle, the Vienna Offensive Operation began, during which very significant results were achieved.

Perhaps Dietrich did not suspect how close he was to the intended goal. After all, the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front on March 9 was already ready to consider the possibility of withdrawing troops beyond the Danube. In addition, it asked to be allowed to use the 9th Guards Army in a defensive battle - a strategic reserve intended for an attack on Vienna. If these Tolbukhin's proposals had been carried out, Hitler's goal would actually have been achieved. Soviet troops would be pushed back to the Danube and would be forced to use a significant part of their strategic reserves in a defensive battle. It could drag out the war

if not for six months, then at least for two or three months. However, such a development of events seems absolutely improbable.

Shtemenko in his memoirs, wittingly or unwittingly, dramatizes the situation that had developed by March 9 in the Balaton area. After all, the Stavka had at its disposal significant reserves, the 6th Guards Tank and 9th Guards Armies. With these forces, the Danube bridgehead certainly succeeded

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would keep. Another thing is that both of these armies would have suffered losses in defensive battles and, probably, the attack on Vienna would have to be postponed for another two or three weeks. However, the German troops would have suffered additional losses in battles with two Soviet armies and would have been even more weakened by the beginning of the Vienna operation, which would have reduced their resistance. So the war could drag on for a maximum of a week or two, but not for six months.

Already [] and on March 14, Dietrich asked Hitler to stop the offensive due to the fact that the terrain had become impassable for tanks due to mud, but was refused. The German offensive stopped only after the Soviet offensive against Vienna began on 16 March.

Bye. defensive battles were going on, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command was concentrating the 9th Guards Army and other reserves for an attack on Vienna. On March 16, this army, with the support of the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps of the 2nd Ukrainian Front and the 4th Guards Army, launched an offensive north of Szekesfehervar, covering the German group advancing in the inter-lake area. On March 19, the 6th Guards Tank Army was introduced into the gap. Because of the threat of encirclement, the 6th SS Panzer Army had to hastily retreat to the Veszprem-Papa-Tarkany line.

Sepp Dietrich recalled: "The Russians threw their divisions on General Balck's 6th Army, which was on my left, and achieved a breakthrough. Air reconnaissance reported the movement of 3-4 thousand trucks with infantry and tanks from the Budapest area. The command of the army group immediately ordered the 12th SS Panzer Division to move to Shtulweisenburg (Szekesfehervar) and to the north of it in order to close the Russian breakthrough there. In the meantime, the Russians reached Zamol, Oshakvar and the Bakon forest. The road between Shtulweisenburg, Warpolota and Veszprem had to be held by the 12th SS division in order to be able to localize the Russian breakthrough. The Russian strike from the southwest towards Lake Balaton was aimed at separating my army from Balck's army. A hard battle ensued. We identified four mechanized brigades from the enemy

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dy, five tank corps and ten guard divisions, consisting of young, well-trained and armed soldiers.

Here the commander of the 6th SS Panzer Army did not exaggerate the number of Red Army units operating against him, but exaggerated the degree of training of the Red Army. On the contrary, young, newly drafted Red Army soldiers, especially from among the inhabitants of the occupied territories, as well as former "Eastern workers", rushed into battle untrained and were inferior to German soldiers in terms of combat training, although in the 45th veterans with extensive combat - I repeat, there was also much less experience there than in 41-42-m.

Hitler hesitated to throw Dietrich's army into a counterattack against the advancing Soviet formations, as demanded by the commander of Army Group South, General Wöhler. The Fuehrer could not accept the fact that the widely conceived operation in Hungary had failed. As a result, the Soviet troops pushed so far to the west that the counterattack of the 6th SS Panzer Army was hopelessly late. The SS divisions had to hastily retreat to the southwest along the coast of Lake Balaton.

On 2 April, the oil fields and refineries of Western Hungary were lost. This marked the beginning of the agony of German resistance.

Thus, the failure of the counteroffensive of the 6th SS Panzer Army in Hungary buried the last hopes for the possibility of a successful defense of the Alpine Fortress.

As a result of ten days of fierce fighting, the 6th SS Panzer Army penetrated the defenses of the Soviet troops south of Lake Velence up to 12 km, and west of the Sharviz Canal - up to 30 km. On March 15, the German offensive was stopped. And the very next day, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian and the left wing of the 2nd Ukrainian fronts began the Vienna strategic offensive operation in order to complete the defeat of the Nazi troops in the western part of Hungary and liberate the capital of Austria - Vienna, which Dietrich's army left on 13 April. Now the idea of "Alpine

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fortress" has lost all meaning. These events influenced the decision to stay in Berlin, contrary to the original intention to evacuate with the government to the south, to Berchtesgaden, in order to continue the fight "in the Alpine fortress". The Fuhrer realized that the agony in the south would not last long, and it would be much more honorable for him to die in Berlin than in some obscure Alpine village. It is no coincidence that the intensive construction of fortifications in and around Berlin began at the end of March, when it became clear that it would not be possible to hold out in Hungary.

The whole result of the actions of the 6th SS Panzer Army in Hungary came down to the fact that the start of the Soviet offensive against Vienna was delayed by ten days. In addition, in the oncoming tank battle, Dietrich's army inflicted significant losses on the 6th Guards Tank Army and did not allow it to develop success and close the encirclement south of Szekesfehervar. All this delayed the capture by the Red Army of the oil refineries of Western Hungary and Austria, as well as the Austrian capital, by only a few days.

Of course, this prolongation of the war for a couple of weeks could not have any strategic significance. But it must be admitted that the 6th SS Panzer Army, although objectively it could not solve the ambitious task of defeating the 3rd Ukrainian Front and reaching the Danube, nevertheless came close enough to solving another more realistic task - to weaken the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front as much as possible. of the Ukrainian Front and force it to use at least part of the forces intended for the attack on Vienna to repel the German counteroffensive. Tolbukhin really had to use all the army and front reserves to repel the attack of the 6th SS Panzer Army. A little more - and we would have to bring into battle the strategic reserve - the 9th Guards Army. And with his quick retreat and oncoming battle, which stopped the advance of the 6th Guards Tank Army, Dietrich saved his own army from inevitable defeat. But with his withdrawal, carried out without orders, he aroused the wrath of Hitler. On March 27, another conversation between Hitler and Goebbels took place, as described in the last diary.

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Go: "And on the Hungarian sector of the front, the situation is becoming very critical. Here, apparently, we are threatened with the loss of an oil production area that is important for us. Our formations of the SS troops showed themselves very poorly here. Even the Leibstandarte, because the old cadres of its officers and rank and file have been killed. The current "Leibstandarte" retained only its honorary name. And despite this, the Fuhrer decided to teach the SS troops a lesson. Himmler, on his instructions, flew to Hungary to take away the sleeve patches from these units. For Sepp Dietrich, this will, of course, be the worst shame imaginable. The generals from the ground forces are terribly happy about this: such a blow for their competitors! The SS troops in Hungary not only failed to carry out their own offensive, but also retreated, and partly even fled. The poor quality of the human material proved to be the most unpleasant

way. One can only pity Sepp Dietrich, but one can also sympathize with Himmler, who, being the chief of the SS troops, who does not have any military awards, must perform this difficult action against Sepp Dietrich, who wears diamonds (to the Knight's Cross. - B . WITH.). But what is worse is that our oil production area is now under severe threat. It is necessary at all costs to keep at least this base, which we need to wage war.

And here is what the German military historian General Kurt Tippelskirch wrote about this in his "History of the Second World War": "An event occurred that hit Hitler like a bolt from the blue. The SS panzer divisions used for the offensive, as well as the detachments of his bodyguards, on which he relied like a stone mountain, could not stand it: their strength and faith were exhausted. In a fit of boundless fury, Hitler ordered the sleeve insignia bearing his name to be removed from them.

After the end of the fighting, in the period from March 29 to April 10, 1945, a commission created by the artillery headquarters of the 3rd Ukrainian Front and a number of central people's commissariats examined the battlefield in the areas of Lake Balaton, Szekesfehervara, Tsetse and the Kapos canals , Sharviz and Yelusha. She found

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968 enemy tanks and assault guns, as well as 446 armored personnel carriers and off-road trucks, knocked out, burned or abandoned by the Germans during the retreat. This number also includes equipment that was taken into account during the February inspection. In addition, this partly included armored vehicles lost by the Germans during the Vienna Offensive, in particular, during the battles with the 6th Guards Tank Army. 968 tanks and assault guns are the irretrievable losses of the 6th SS Panzer Army, the 6th Army and the 2nd Panzer Army during the fighting in Hungary in March-early April 1945. In addition, this includes 86 tanks and assault guns and 4 armored personnel carriers lost by the Germans in the January battles. It should also be taken into account that many tanks and assault guns were abandoned by the Germans during the retreat due to lack of fuel or the inability to pull them out of the mud. Before that, they tried to render them unusable by blowing them up, although some fell into the hands of the Red Army in good condition.

Among the studied 400 burnt tanks and assault guns, 19 Tiger I tanks, 6 Tiger tanks, 37 Panther tanks, 37 T-U \ tanks, 9 T-Sh tanks (tanks of this type were flamethrower, command tanks and tanks of artillery observers), 27 tanks and self-propelled guns of Hungarian production, as well as 140 assault and self-propelled guns and 105 engineering vehicles, armored personnel carriers and armored vehicles. Among the examined samples, those hit by artillery fire predominated (389 vehicles), and only a small part was blown up by mines or was disabled by other means (for example, one Panther tank, by all indications, was burned by a bottle of KS). According to the main statistical indicators, these studies basically repeated the February ones. What was new was that the number of shell holes made by 76-mm and 57-mm guns was approximately equal, and the number of holes made by large-caliber guns (100 -122 mm) ammunition.

Among the 968 destroyed and abandoned armored vehicles, 400 of the most interesting were investigated by the commission.

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samples. Of these, 389 were disabled by artillery fire, 10 were blown up by mines and one tank was destroyed by a Molotov cocktail. About the losses of the Soviet armored forces in two battles near Balaton, reliable data in the published sources are not available.

968 tanks and assault guns irretrievably lost by the Germans in Hungary is a huge figure. The power of the German tank formations that retreated to Austria was thoroughly

undermined. Later, Sepp Dietrich joked sadly that his army was called the 6th Panzer Army because it had only six tanks in service.

The German troops intended for the offensive in the area of Lake Balaton were armed, according to Soviet intelligence, with 807 tanks and assault guns (including up to 300 heavy tanks of the "tiger" and "royal tiger" type and up to 240 tanks Type "Panther"), 816 armored personnel carriers and 3280 guns and mortars. In addition, the 2nd Panzer Army had 70 tanks and assault guns. The exact number of German and Hungarian troops participating in the Battle of Balaton is unknown. Intelligence of the 3rd Ukrainian Front believed that there were 35 enemy formations in front of the troops of the front, numbering 431,000 soldiers and officers. They were armed with 5,630 guns and mortars, 877 tanks and assault guns, and 900 armored personnel carriers.

The 3rd Ukrainian Front had 37 rifle and airborne divisions (the latter were used only as rifle divisions), 6 infantry (Bulgarian) and 3 cavalry divisions, as well as 2 tank and 1 mechanized corps and 1 fortified area. The front had over 465 thousand Soviet soldiers and officers, in addition, the 1st Bulgarian Army, which was part of the front, numbered more than 100 thousand people. The troops of the front, excluding the Bulgarian formations, numbered 6889 guns and mortars, 407 tanks and self-propelled artillery installations and 965 aircraft.

According to official figures from the Ministry of Defense

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Russia, given in the reference book "Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century. Losses of the Armed Forces", the number of Soviet troops in the 3rd Ukrainian Front by the beginning of the Balaton operation was 465 thousand people. Irrecoverable losses amounted to 8492 people (unfortunately, it is not indicated how many were killed and how many were missing), sanitary losses amounted to 24,407 people, and in total - 32,899 people. According to Soviet estimates, German losses in the Battle of Balaton in February-March 1945 amounted to 45 thousand soldiers and officers, about 500 tank assault guns, up to 300 guns and mortars, almost 500 armored personnel carriers and 250 aircraft. The Germans took 4,400 prisoners. If we accept the German data on 4400 prisoners close to the truth, then the number of dead can be estimated at 4092 people. It turns out that there were six times more wounded than killed (the share of sick people in sanitary losses during fierce battles was negligible). Usually, the number of wounded exceeds the number of those killed by 3-4 times. If we assume that in fact the excess of the wounded over those killed in the Soviet troops in the Balaton battle was at least fourfold, this will increase the number of those killed by at least 6 thousand people. It should also be taken into account that the 3rd Ukrainian Front included the 1st Bulgarian Army, which numbered about 100 thousand people and also suffered certain losses in killed and wounded.

By the time the Vienna Offensive Operation began on March 16, 1945, the composition of the 3rd Ukrainian Front had increased significantly. The fresh 9th Guards Army from the Headquarters reserve was introduced into its composition. The number of rifle divisions increased to 42, 4 airborne divisions were added, the number of tank corps increased from 2 to 3, and the number of mechanized corps increased from 1 up to 2, the number of cavalry divisions and fortified areas remained the same - respectively, 1. In addition, the front received an additional one separate mechanized and one separate self-propelled artillery brigade. The total number of front troops increased to 536,700 people. If we take the tank and mechanized corps equal in number

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blooded rifle division, and equate two brigades in number to one division, then from the moment the second Balaton battle began until the start of the Vienna operation, the total number of settlement divisions increased from 43.5 to 55.5 (we take the fortified area

equal to half a division), not counting the 1st Bulgarian army. At the same time, the newly arrived formations and units of army subordination of the 9th Guards and 6th Guards Tank Armies were much more full-blooded than the formations that were already part of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. Only due to the replenishment with new formations, the number of troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, compared to that by March 6, 1945, by March 16 should have increased by at least 27.6%. And this is without taking into account marching replenishments. If there were no losses in the Balaton operation, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front would have numbered about 593.3 thousand people by March 16, i.e., by the day the Vienna operation began, while only 536,700 people were in the front. Thus, without taking into account marching reinforcements, the total Soviet losses can be estimated at least 56.6 thousand people.

Experience shows that the bulk of the underestimation of losses in the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War accounted for irretrievable losses (killed and missing), which were taken into account much worse than sanitary losses. If we assume that the entire underestimation in the event of the second Balaton battle falls on the irretrievable losses of the Red Army, then their total amount can be estimated at 23.7 thousand. If we subtract 4.4 thousand prisoners from this figure, then the share of those killed is 19.3 thousand people.

The losses of the 1st Bulgarian army in the second Balaton battle can be estimated as follows. In total, the Bulgarian troops during the fighting on the side of the Anti-Hitler coalition lost about 7 thousand killed and about 25 thousand wounded. The main losses of the 1st Bulgarian army suffered in three operations - Budapest, Balaton and Vienna. In the Vienna operation, she lost 2,698 killed and missing and 7,107 wounded. It can be assumed that the remaining losses fell on two other operations, in

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which the role of the Bulgarian troops was purely auxiliary. In the Budapest operation, the Bulgarians fought 6 times longer than in the Balaton one, but in the latter they experienced a much stronger blow from the Germans. Therefore, it can be assumed that the losses of the army in these two operations were approximately the same. Then the Second Battle of Balaton will have about 2.15 thousand dead and missing and about 9 thousand wounded Bulgarians.

There are no data on the losses of the Yugoslav army in the second Balaton battle. Since her combat activity was small, let's assume that her losses were half those of the Bulgarian army. Then its losses can be estimated at 1.1 thousand killed and 4.5 thousand wounded. In this case, the total losses of the Soviet side, taking into account the losses of the Bulgarians and Yugoslavs, will amount to 73.4 thousand people, including irreparable losses - 27 thousand.

German losses are known to us only in the Soviet estimate - 45 thousand people, without division into killed and wounded. If we assume that the advancing German troops almost did not suffer losses as prisoners, then we can assume that the sanitary and irretrievable losses of the Germans and Hungarians correlated approximately as 3:1. Then the losses of the German-Hungarian troops killed and missing can be estimated at 11.3 thousand killed and missing. In this case, the ratio of the total losses of the Soviet-Bulgarian-Yugoslav troops and the German-Hungarian troops in the second Balaton battle will be 1.6:1, and irretrievable losses - 2.4:1. It turns out to be unfavorable for the Soviet side.

The weak point of the Soviet anti-tank defense was traditionally the low resistance of the infantry cover, which often could not withstand even the initial attacks of German tanks and retreated in disorder. A significant part of the replenishment of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, as well as other Soviet fronts in the last two years of the war, were conscripts from the liberated regions, who were practically not trained in military affairs. It also significantly reduced the combat capability of the Soviet troops. All this, as well as

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Taty management and interaction, led to large casualties.

Undoubtedly, in the Vienna Offensive, the ratio of losses was much more favorable for the Red Army, primarily due to the large losses of the Hungarian troops killed and captured. And the success of the Vienna operation was largely ensured by the staunch defense of the armies of the 3rd Ukrainian Front during the Balaton defensive operation. The heavy losses of German armored vehicles during the Vienna operation, when the Germans, in particular, had to abandon almost all the tanks and assault guns damaged during the second Balaton battle, have already been mentioned above. Of the 1024 tank self-propelled guns of the German-Hungarian troops that participated in the Battle of Balaton, as well as opposed the Soviet troops at the first stage of the Vienna operation, when hostilities unfolded on the territory of Hungary, 515 were destroyed by artillery fire, and 185 were captured in good order. condition. This was basically equipment abandoned during the retreat.

But according to the testimony of S. M. Shtemenko, transmitted in the biography of the former commander-in-chief of artillery of the 3rd Ukrainian Front M. I. Nedelin, written by V. F. Tolubko, when, after the capture of Vienna, Colonel-General of Artillery Nedelin was introduced to the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, Tolbukhin and especially Nedelin at the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command were accused of large unjustified losses during the Balaton defensive operation, as a result of which the front lost a significant number of people, artillery and tanks. True, Mitrofan Ivanovich did receive the Hero's star then. According to Shtemenko, I.V. Stalin, having received the materials of the Vienna operation from F.I. Tolbukhin and having studied them, summoned A.M. Vasilevsky and S.M. Shtemenko to his office and told them:

"It is quite obvious that the artillery of the 3rd Ukrainian in the Balaton operation brilliantly fulfilled its tasks. And the losses of the Germans far exceed ours. The front artillery headquarters did a good job, and Nedelin led the troops skillfully, with a great understanding of the situation. I think,

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that the artillery commander is worthy of the title of Hero of the Soviet Union." Of course, the marshal and colonel general tried to convince Stalin that the enemy had lost much more than our troops, at least in armored vehicles. Yes, and the German-Hungarian losses in men, according to the reports of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, were more than the Soviet ones - 45 thousand against 33. That's just Tolbukhin received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union posthumously, in 1965. It turns out that Stalin was not so pleased with his generals and marshals who fought at Balaton, as Goebbels wrote in his diary.

This episode is also evidence that the official data on Soviet losses in the second Balaton battle are significantly underestimated. Indeed, according to these data, the average daily irretrievable losses of the Soviet troops amounted to 849 people, or 0.18% of the total number of armies participating in the battle. Meanwhile, in the Vienna operation, the size of the average daily irretrievable losses on the same 3rd Ukrainian Front, according to the same official, clearly underestimated data, amounted to 1060 people, or 0.20% of the total number of front troops, i.e. e. was noticeably higher than in the Battle of Balaton. However, this circumstance did not arouse Stalin's anger, and Stalin did not scold the marshals for the Vienna operation.

The offensive of the 6th SS Panzer Army, as well as the SS divisions of the 1U SS Panzer Corps near Lake Balaton in March 1945, was the last major operation of the SS troops in World War II. It pursued the goal of prolonging German resistance, creating conditions for the effective defense of the Alpine Fortress and the possible prolongation of the war until contradictions between the USSR and the Western allies appeared. The collapse of this offensive made the surrender of Germany inevitable in less than two months. With it, the SS troops ceased to exist, the most combat-ready divisions of which were defeated on the Eastern Front by the Red Army.

Appendix 1 IN THE TRAKE OF THE SOVIET STIRLITS

Issue 5 of Rodina magazine for 2007 featured a very interesting article by Vladimir Makarov and Vasily Khristoforov, "A Riddle for Zeppelin," in which documents from the FSB archives were published for the first time, dedicated to one of the radio games conducted by Chekists in 1943-1945. It can be assumed that the plot of this game was reflected in the classics of the Soviet military detective - Vadim Kozhevnikov's novel "Shield and Sword". Indeed, the protagonist of the novel, Johann Weiss (Ivan Belov), resembles the Soviet intelligence officer Severov, who infiltrated the German intelligence school and recruited the German intelligence officer Boitsov there. Both of them became the main characters of the aforementioned Soviet radio game "The Riddle". Fighters, on the other hand, may have served as a prototype for another hero of the "Shield and Sword" - the Riga German Heinrich Schwarzkopf, an employee of the SD and the nephew of one of the prominent Nazi bosses, SS Gruppenführer Willy Schwarzkopf. In the novel, Weiss-Belov successfully recruits Heinrich, who becomes a staunch antifascist working for Soviet intelligence. In life, Boitsov was, as reported in the reference cited in the article by Makarov and Khristoforov, as follows: "Agent Boitsov, born in 1922, a native of the city of Libava, Latvian SSR. German, merchant seaman. Until 1938 he was a member of the Union of German Youth of Latvia. In 1941 he was repatriated from Latvia to Germa

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nyu. From 1940 he was an agent of German intelligence in Latvia. He graduated from the German intelligence school in Munki-Niemi (near Helsinki, Finland). I was personally acquainted with Admiral Canaris. At the beginning of the war with the USSR, he was twice transferred to the Soviet rear as part of sabotage groups in the area of the Murmansk railway. In December 1941, he was transferred to the Cellarius Bureau, and from there to the Sonderatz Leningrad group of Sonderfuehrer Bushman (the goal was to capture especially important documents, primarily security agencies). In connection with the failure of plans to capture Leningrad, Bushman's group was transferred to Tallinn. Inspected German intelligence schools. In 1942, in one of the German intelligence schools, he met the Soviet front-line agent Severov and was recruited for intelligence work in favor of the Soviet counterintelligence. In Kozhevnikov's novel, as we remember, Heinrich Schwarzkopf also inspects intelligence schools, where he meets again with Weiss-Belov, who recruits him. Boitsov's maritime profession Kozhevnikov turned into Weiss and Heinrich's passion for sailing and settled them not in Libau (Liepaja), but in Riga, more familiar to him. In the novel, of course, recruitment goes off without a hitch. But could it really be like this? Judging by the biographical information, Boytsov was a completely convinced Nazi, a long-time and successful agent of the Abwehr. Why would he suddenly in 1942, even before Stalingrad, lose faith in Hitler and in the victory of Germany and imbued with sympathy for the Soviet Union? Here I suspected that the radio play was a double one. The Germans understood who Severov was, and Boitsov allowed himself to be recruited on the instructions of his leadership. It understood that the Russians would conduct a radio game with him through Severov and Boitsov, and decided to take advantage of this circumstance. After all, if you know that the incoming information is deliberate misinformation, then on their basis you can try to form an idea of the actual state of things. This version also supports some of the questions that the Germans posed by agents. According to legend, Severov's cousin Kolesnikov was a major official of the People's Commissariat of Railways, which did not prevent him from being an ardent anti-Soviet and

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dream of escaping to the West. Boitsov and Severov recruited him and the bulk of the information was drawn from this source. And what did the Germans want to find out from Kolesnikov? For example, in early November, the agents receive the following task: "Try to find out the true goals of Stalin at the Moscow Conference and to what extent he managed to convince the allies to accept his plans." Excuse me, but the Abwehr and the SD were by no means fools. Did they really not understand that even a high-ranking official of the NKPS would never be able to give reliable answers to such questions, which even Commissar Kaganovich himself hardly knows? But if the Germans know that they are dealing with a Soviet radio game, then such questions turn out to be quite logical. The answers to them can be assessed something like this: the Russians want us Germans to have such

an idea about the events that took place at the Moscow Conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of England, the USSR and the USA, and this idea is most likely very far from the truth. For the sake of the success of such a double radio game, it was easy to sacrifice a small fry, like an ordinary employee of the SD, Alois Galfe. But the Germans, apparently, sought to evacuate Boitsov to Germany, the nocturnal security officers did not allow this to be done. It is interesting how the fate of people who we know so far only by the pseudonyms of Severov and Boitsov developed after the war. If my version is correct, then Boitsov could have tried to flee to the West after the war. Or maybe he was arrested. Curiously, it was impossible to legally incriminate him with anything. After all, he did not conduct any actions to collect intelligence information, but only transmitted the disinformation that the Soviet counterintelligence gave him.

The story, which, perhaps, formed the basis of the novel "Shield and Sword", made me remember another Soviet Stirlitz, only an imaginary one, who considered Kozhevnikov's novel to be the most truthful work about intelligence. Recently in Riga, at an international conference, I met the Israeli historian Aron Schneer, who presented me with his book "Fingerless gloves and a torn top hat". It was a recording of his conversations with the person he

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I met in Jerusalem and who introduced himself as a former Soviet illegal intelligence officer in Nazi Germany. Schneer's interlocutor had a stormy biography. He allegedly fell to the Germans in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, being a military adviser to the Republicans and defecting to the side of the enemy. In Germany, he proved his kinship with the family of the famous general Leonty Bennigsen, which opened the doors of aristocratic salons for him. He then served in the SS Leibstandarte, took part in the campaigns of 1939-1940 in Poland and in France, commanding a company in the Leibstandarte tank battalion. Near Amiens in June 40, he was seriously wounded, after which he was demobilized. After that, our intelligence officer became the authorized representative of the Messerschmitt concern for manpower, recruited workers for aircraft factories in concentration camps, rose to the rank of SS Sturmbannführer, returned to the Leibstandarte at the end of 1944, on the eve of the counteroffensive in the Ardennes, during which he surrendered to the Americans. Then, with the rank of colonel and under the surname Boris Mikhailovich Goglidze, in 1945-1947 he worked in the Soviet reparation mission in France, in 1948-1951 he was an adviser to the commercial attaché in Belgium, in 1952-1953 he was a representative on the Lend-Lease commission in France, in 1953-1956 - trade attaché in Paris, and 1963-1966 - in the same place, but already as an adviser to the Soviet embassy on trade. All these posts were just a cover for intelligence activities. After 1956, Schneer's interlocutor got a job as an animator at the Georgia Film studio, where he returned in 1966. There, in particular, he drew the famous cartoons "The Adventures of Samodelkin" and "The Wedding of Jays". This recognition makes it possible to unambiguously identify the hero of the book as Avenir Mikhailovich Khuskivadze (Aron told me that readers made such an identification in letters after the publication of the book). Khuskivadze died in Jerusalem on May 24, 2000. The book was published after his death.

Avenir Mikhailovich spoke about detective literature in the following way: "If anything looks like the truth, it is "Shield and Sword".

Schneer's book read like a fascinating novel. I'm about

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I saw her for two days in Riga, and doubts about the authenticity of Khuskivadze's story immediately crept in. He was too similar to Soviet spy novels, and his path was too similar to the path of Johann Weiss, who, however, rose only to the rank of SS Hauptsturmführer, but also traveled around the camps in search of personnel for intelligence schools. In Moscow, when I got to the computer, my doubts grew into certainty. Having easily found the combat schedule of the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler on the net, I found out that in 1940 there was no tank battalion in the Leibstandarte, so there was simply nowhere to serve Khuskivadze. Yes, and at that time they took into the Leibstandarte only purebred Aryan grenadiers no lower than 1 m 80 cm, and Khuskivadze, like

reports Schneer, was short. But on the Internet there was a reference to Khuskivadze as a repressed person with reference to the "Book of Memory of the Kemerovo Region": "Avenir Mikhailovich Khuskivadze: (GOGLIDZE) born in 1918; coach of the Leninsk-Kuznetsk sports school.

Condemned. 03/03/1952 Military tribunal Zapsib8VO. Rev. under Art. 58 - 1 hour 1, 58-8.

Sentence: 25 years with disqualification for > years. By the decision of the Supreme Court of the RSFSR on January 18, 1956, the punishment was reduced to deprivation of liberty, according to Art. 58-8 acquitted, released under an amnesty decree on February 14, 1956." It is worth recalling here that Art. 58-10 is anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, and Art. 58-8 - committing terrorist acts.

I note that on the Internet there is an indication of the exact date of birth of A. M. Khuskivadze - October 5, 1918. In Schneer's book, 1912 appeared as the year of birth of the imaginary Sturmbannführer. Since 1918, the version about Khuskivadze's service as an adviser to the Spanish Republicans and his transition to the Germans in Spain has completely collapsed. No one would send an 18-year-old youth to Spain. His stay in the camp fell on the period when Khuskivadze, according to him, allegedly served in the Soviet trade missions in Belgium and France. It became clear that Avenir Mikhailovich invented a biography for himself. Well, neon first, neon last. Let us recall, for example, the famous writer Vladimir Bogomolov (Voitinsky), who invented

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a heroic military biography and service in SMERSH©, but in fact, as journalist Olga Kuchkina showed, he had never fought a day. I decided to try to reconstruct the true biography of Avenir Mikhailovich Khuskivadze, a remarkable artist and no less remarkable storyteller and visionary. And he sent a request about him to the FSB Directorate for the Kemerovo region. The answer came very quickly.

Here is an om dated December 18, 2007:

"Dear Boris Vadimovich!

In response to your statement, we inform you that in the archives of the Department of the Federal Security Service of Russia for the Kemerovo Region there is an archival criminal case (AUD) No. P-15717 in respect of Khuskivadze Avenir Mikhailovich, aka Goglidze Boris Mikhailovich, is stored.

According to the documents available at the AUD, Khuskivadze A.M., born in 1918, a native of Moscow, who lived before his arrest in the city of Leninsk-Kuznetsky, Kemerovo Region, Lenina Street, 2, apt. 2, who worked as a boxing coach at a sports school, was arrested on February 14, 1951 by the UMGB in the Kemerovo region.

Khuskivadze A. M. was accused of "systematically conducting anti-Soviet conversations among those around him, in which he slandered Soviet reality, praised the military power of America and the life of workers in capitalist countries, praised the destroyed enemies of the people" (as in case).

The composition of the family at the time of the arrest of Khuskivadze Avenir Mikhailovich: father - Khuskivadze Mikhail Sokratovich, born in 1882; mother - Ekaterina Modestovna Khuskivadze, born in 1882; wife - Bitnaya Anna Nikodimovna, born in 1925; daughter - Khuskivadze Karmen Avenirovna, born in 1947.

He was convicted by the Military Tribunal of the West Siberian Military District on March 3, 1952 under Art. 58-10 part 1, 58-8 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR to 25 years in labor camps, with disqualification for 5 years, with confiscation of property.

By the decision of the Supreme Court of the USSR on January 18, 1956, the verdict of the Military Tribunal of the West Siberian Military

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district under Art. 58-8 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR is canceled, under Art. 58-10h | the sentence was reduced to 5 years in labor camp, confiscation of property was excluded from the sentence. On the basis of the decree "On Amnesty", Khuskivadze A.M. was released from places of detention.

By the conclusion of the prosecutor's office of the Kemerovo region on February 8, 1993, Khuskivadze A.M. was completely rehabilitated.

In the period from 1937 to 1941 Khuskivadze A.M. studied at the Tbilisi Art Academy, in 1941 he took courses at the Tbilisi Artillery School. In June 1942 he went to the front as a volunteer. On July 7, 1942, in the village of Lukyanovka, Voronezh Region, while trying to break through the ring of German troops, Huskivadze A.M. was wounded in the left shoulder, as a result of which he was taken prisoner. He was in captivity until April 1945, after his release he changed his surname and first name (Goglidze Boris). From August 1947 to July 1950 Khuskivadze A.M. lived in the city of Kemerovo, worked in the Central Mechanical Workshop, at the Severnaya mine, the Kemerovo horseshoe factory.

Deputy Head of the Department G. P. Udovichenko (signature)".

From this answer it is clear that before the second half of 1942, Khuskivadze could not get to Germany in any way. And he studied only at the Tbilisi Art Academy, while he told Schnee that he transferred from the Tbilisi Academy to the Leningrad Art Academy, and at the same time completed three courses at the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute. But he kept silent about the Tbilisi Artillery School, because it did not fit into the legend. The fact that Khuskivadze ended up in the Kemerovo region only in August 1947 suggests that he was repatriated relatively late from the western zones of occupation by Germany or Austria, perhaps as early as 1946. He could spend several months in a filtration camp in Germany, and then in Siberia. It was this fate that befell, for example, the former soldier of the Red Army and the prisoner of Mauthausen and the future writer Yuri Pilyar. After his release, he and his comrades spent several months in a filtration camp in the Soviet occupation zone in Austria, and then for further

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checks they were sent to one of the Siberian camps. By the way, Pilar was just a German, from the family of barons Pillar von Pilhau. This family was also related to Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov. It is possible that Huskivadze knew Pilyar, and this acquaintance prompted him to invent a German branch of his family tree and connect it with Bennigsen, who at one time was Kutuzov's chief of staff.

Zhenau Khuskivadze also turned out to be one of the repressed. According to the database of the Memorial Society, Anna Nikodimovna Bitnaya, born in 1924, who lived in the Smolensk District, was sentenced by the Smolensk Regional Department of Internal Affairs on March 21, 1931, in all likelihood, to exile in Siberia (she was rehabilitated only in 1994). She was apparently convicted on the same day along with her father, Russian, Nikodim Varfolomeevich Bitny, [born 885], mother, Stepanida Antonovna, born in 1888, brother Nikodim, born in 1921, and sister Stepanida, born in 1929. And they lived in the village of Zakalino.

It can be assumed that Khuskivadze could meet his wife upon leaving the camp (or met while still in the camp), and this prompted him to stay in Siberia, especially since in the European part of the country, former prisoners were not very willing to register. And maybe he had something to hide from the authorities. It is hardly by chance that immediately after the war, Khuskivadze changed his rare name and surname. Perhaps he hid his service with the Germans. But Khuskivadze definitely didn't serve in the Leibstandarte, but he could well have served in the Georgian SS legion. I will only note that the Georgian legion was transferred to the SS together with other eastern legions only in 1944, and before that it was part of the Wehrmacht. By the way, Khuskivadze speaks very badly about the soldiers of the Georgian legion in conversations with Schnee:

"A. Sh. Have you ever met with your countrymen?

A.P. How about. Especially in Paris: Caucasians mostly fought on the Western Front. Have you seen the movie "Heroes of Texel Island"? At the box office - Crucified Island. This is the rim

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nome from the Georgian battalions. There were several of them: "Dora-1", "Dora-2". I was talking to one of these "comrades" at the film studio when this film was being shot. So I said bluntly that they should have been hanged all of them when they returned to the Soviet Union, and not a film about them should have been made. When this battalion fought with the partisans in Belarus, did they not revolt? No. And in May 45 they raised an uprising. Five days before the victory, where were you before? .. And they were sent to the camps correctly, from my point of view, they served the Germans. Aodintoli Georgian, or Armenian battalion surrendered in general in mid-May. They defended Fort Linderman on the west coast. The battalion had been sitting there since the day the allies landed and did not give up, and the British and Americans did not want to lose people. A German general was brought to them on the 20th, who explained that the war was over." Perhaps this is a kind of defensive reaction of a person who himself served in the legion? Khuskivadze got used to the image so much that he treated the Georgian collaborators the way a former Soviet intelligence officer should have treated them. By the way, at the end of 1944 most of the Georgian battalions, due to low combat capability, were mainly used in the construction of fortifications, so it was easy for Khuskivadze to hide his service with the Germans and tell the British and Americans that he was a prisoner of war who was used in the construction of ny works.

Aron Shneer kindly sent me fragments of the memoirs of Vladimir Melnikov, who met Khuskivadze in the camp. Their paths crossed at the Maikuduk Peschlag transit point in Karaganda in April 1952. According to Melnikov, the chief there was Art. lieutenant or captain Udodov, "really a rare bastard." Khuskivadze, on the other hand, Melnikov characterized as follows in a letter to Schneer: "He was an outstanding personality. I myself was under his charm, and I remain today after 50 years. But this does not mean that he told me and you the truth. In the camps, the truth went side by side with fiction, invented biography. Sometimes a certain goal was pursued, and more often a person, as it were, wrote a novel, where he himself was the acting lin. However, A. M. is not

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was obliged to tell about himself "the truth, only the truth and one truth." Melnikov also told, based either on the stories of Khuskivadze himself, or on camp rumors, some interesting episodes of his biography: "During one of the interrogations, Colonel Balandin began to shout at him, accusing him of treason), and hit Abner. In response, he beat the colonel. Melnikov's fellow prisoner Vladimir Reikhman, who was imprisoned with Khuskivadze in the Kemerovo regional prison, recalled: "A rumor spread that he was taken to Moscow, because during one of the interrogations he beat off the liver of Colonel Balandin, head of the Kemerovo regional department of the MGB." This story is overgrown with legends. After the story of the beating of Balandin, according to Melnikov, "Khuskivadze was transferred to Moscow. They asked the GRU and received an answer that there were no complaints, that he carried out the tasks of the command. Has awards. The article "treason against the motherland" has disappeared, and "terror against representatives of the authorities" remains.

Melnikov stated: "It was written on his personal file: "Do not take him to work, he is inclined to run away." When in April 1953 we were called to the stage, Avenir Mikhailovich put on a strange uniform, very comfortable. According to him, this is the uniform of an English paratrooper. In 1956, when Khuskivadze received a release order, he refused to leave the zone until he was given back his major's uniform. This caused a great commotion among the authorities. But a day or two later he received a uniform with the epaulets of a major, and when he left the zone, the head of the camp, Udodov, took it under his visor. For me, Khuskivadze remained a sweet, intelligent, encyclopedically educated senior comrade.

Aron also sent me, for which I am very grateful to him, a fragment of the memoirs of Marina Perelman, who worked together with Khuskivadze on Georgia Film:

"Uncle Venya (as the whole studio called him) or "Venya" for those who crossed the 40-year mark, was a very remarkable figure in every sense. First, outwardly. Completely shaved skull, manner of holding absolutely straight, a little strange gait: due to injury.

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Venya has always been in good shape. Children and grandchildren were brought up accordingly. A healthy body was needed to protect a healthy spirit from those segments of the population who recognized and understood only the language of force. He did not refuse protection to those in need.

For training, Venya built a gym in the basement. Yes, yes, a real gym, with home-made simulators, kettlebells and barbells. Venya was fond of "bodybuilding", as Bodubpatite was called then. At that time, the authorities did not encourage bodybuilding. Somehow he did not fit into the ideology. And people poured into Uncle Venin's underground "rocking chair". Many from the studio trained for free.

In general, Uncle Venya knew how to help when needed. He arranged my son in a good kindergarten opposite work. Once I heard that I was looking for a drug in short supply for my mother, went to a closed party pharmacy and brought me a bottle, telling me to let me know if needed.

more.

I guess I wasn't the only one he rescued.

The people loved to joke and grumble, as Venya loves to educate everyone, teach, etc.

His stories sometimes seemed so unrealistic, too much of a "kin" about Stirlitz, Kuznetsov or Sorge. On the whole, however, he was loved. The studio seemed boring without him, he was part of her face.

Here it is worth noting that a person can walk completely shaved not only when he is prone to early baldness, but also if he is interested in not being recognized by those who remember him with hair, mustache or beard. The story that Khuskivadze beat the investigator, Colonel Balandin, does not inspire much confidence. For this, most likely, they would have been shot. Although, perhaps, for this case, they added an article on terrorism to him, which increased his term to 25 years. But the mention of a photograph of Khuskivadze in a German military uniform seems quite plausible and can serve as evidence of Khuskivadze's service in the Georgian legion. In all likelihood, in 1946-1947, Avenir Mikhailovich managed to hide this service from the investigation.

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Viya, and now somehow there was a photograph compromising him. It can also be assumed that from the fact of Khuskivadze's service with the Germans, the investigators later concocted a case of terrorism (he was arrested for anti-Soviet agitation, which they considered praising American military power to be).

The story about Khuskivadze wearing a shabby military uniform of a British paratrooper looks quite plausible. It is well known that some Soviet prisoners of war, after being released, enlisted in the British army, where they managed to serve for several months before being repatriated. Former Soviet prisoners of war, for example, were part of the British patrol that arrested Himmler. Probably, Avenir Mikhailovich had a chance to serve in one of the British airborne divisions. Another story, about the fact that before the liberation Khuskivadze demanded the return of the major's uniform, is a common legend applied to various famous personalities, for example, to Konstantin Rokossovsky, who allegedly demanded that the uniform and white coat be delivered to him before the release. horse.

There is no grain of truth, of course, in such legends. Obviously, in the camp stories, Khuskivadze appropriated the rank of major, and in conversations with Schneer promoted himself to colonel. In fact, after graduating from the school, Khuskiwadze had a rank no higher than a lieutenant, and since he spent a few days in the war, he could not get any production.

And indeed, in the camp Khuskivadze, according to Melnikov, presented a slightly different version of his biography than in conversations with Schneer, no less fantastic: "He was born in St. Petersburg in January 1717. He called himself a man of Nikolaev salting, touching, bottling. After the revolution, the family lived in Leningrad, then in Tbilisi. My father was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia...

Avenir Mikhailovich studied in Leningrad at the Technological Institute at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and at the same time at the Academy of Arts, in 1939 the Faculty of Communications was opened in Tbilisi, and Khuskivadze transferred there. In 1940-1941 participated in allied boxing competitions in leg

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whom weight. He performed under the name Goglidze, which became a sports pseudonym. The explanation is simple: the father is a member of the Central Committee, they beat the asyn in the face.

He was drafted into the Red Army at the end of 1940 or the beginning of 1941, and ended up in military intelligence. He spoke in detail about the retreat of the Red Army. Then he works in the German rear ... One of his stories is as follows. In 1943, the Germans recalled the Hauptmann from the front and sent him to the post of head of the V-2 assembly. This German made it safely to Warsaw. When he changed from train to train, our scouts took him and killed him. I asked A.M.: Did you kill him yourself?

No, other people did it in my presence.

And I went with these documents to the factory where the FAA was assembled ... and worked for six months. The killed German was an engineer, a graduate of the Leipzig Higher Technical School (similar to Bauman Moscow State Technical University). We have similar specialties with him. All the documents, my preparations were made in advance. Then I was ordered to disappear. I took a vacation and went to Belgium. I was accidentally detained at the Alsatian border. I didn't have good documents. My German with a Russian and Georgian accent was identified as Alsatian. Since I did not state my nationality, I was interrogated for a long time and then sent to Buchenwald as a stateless person. I asked how the interrogations went, whether they beat me or not.

No, they didn't beat me, but the investigator constantly put out cigarettes on my hands, and he smoked without interruption. Indeed, A. M. had scars on his hands. Two people knew him from Buchenwald: Lieutenant Colonel Bonifatiev, commander of the border regiment, who was taken prisoner wounded.

Through the efforts of intelligence, A. M. was transferred from Buchenwald to some small camp, from where he was organized to escape. After the war, he worked on the repatriation commission. Among the German prisoners of war in the American zone, he identified his interrogator, took him away from the Americans and shot him. The German was amazed to recognize Khuskivadze as a Soviet officer...

For some reason, the last place of duty is Hungary. There were some troubles. I didn't understand why he

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flowed in Leninsk-Kuznetsk. The answer was evasive: he wanted to get lost. He started working as a mechanical engineer in some trust, something went wrong with the notes. Then he left the sports school.

It can be assumed that this time the fictitious date of birth - January 1917 - was intended to show that Yato Khuskivadze-Goglidze was born before the February Revolution.

Probably, the change of name and surname was also connected with the desire to get lost. Melnikov confirmed, according to his fellow camper Vladimir Reikhman, who studied at the school where Avenir Mikhailovich was a boxing coach, that in Leninsk-Kuznetsk he was known under the name Goglidze.

By the way, Khuskivadze got rid of the Soviet orders in much the same way as another dreamer, the writer Vladimir Bogomolov. Avenir Mikhailovich allegedly had two orders of Lenin, the Order of the Red Banner and the Red Star, and for service in the German army he had two Iron Crosses. And, according to him, after the tragic events of April 1989 on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi, "after the April events in Tbilisi, my wife and I came to the Central Committee and threw party cards along with awards on the table." Bogomolov, as if at the beginning of the 1950s, after serving almost a year under investigation on false charges, after his release threw the awards returned to him into the trash can.

I believe that in fact the whole story of the imaginary Soviet Stirlitz-Sturmbannführer, as Vladimir Melnikov correctly noted, was born during his imprisonment in the camp. After all, survival sometimes depended on the ability to compose a beautiful biography for oneself, turning it into a real novel that could captivate the neighbors in the barracks (see Kolyma Tales by Varlam Shalamov). This is how the legends about Stirlitz are born. The old literary critic Marlen Korallov, who met with Melnikov and Khuskivadze in Maikuduk, rightly said: "Having heard enough of prison-camp chatter, I came to the conclusion a long time ago that prisoners lie better than fishermen and hunters. Not everyone lies, not always, however, forming a powerful popular layer in Russia, and not by chance, but based on historical, socio-psychological motives. So

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bent three deaths need revenge. As in the eyes of the lucky ones, who until now were lucky to slip past the prison, so in their own, faded. The humiliated and offended must remain individuals. Having thundered into the camp, a young lieutenant, as a rule, longs to be awarded the rank of captain. A major would be nice. The regimental commander at one time or another inadvertently recalls that he had to command a corps. And after serving five or seven or nine years, he begins to firmly believe in it. And don't try to disprove it."

Khuskivadze, on the other hand, as reported in the card index of irretrievable losses, now available on the Internet (Bp: //m\o6a-tetopa1.gi/Metopa1/Metopa1.Vt!), in the Red Army was only a senior lieutenant, Deputy Battery Commander of the 526th Light Artillery Regiment. It also says that he was born in 1918 in Moscow and was a member of the Komsomol (whereas he himself, in conversations with Schnee, claimed that he was a member of the CPSU (6b)). A request about it no later than January 1944 was sent by Maria Georgievna Soldatova, who lived in Moscow at the address: Aviamotornaya street, 4, bldg. 4, apt. 7 and had not received letters from him since August 1942. Most likely, it was the common-law wife of Avenir Mikhailovich, to whom he, in all likelihood, sent his certificate to receive monetary allowance. Maybe one of her relatives will respond and help clarify Khuskivadze's story.

Appendix 2

DOCUMENTS ON THE BATTLE OF KURSK

LOSSES OF THE 5TH GUARDS TANK ARMY IN THE PERIOD FROM 11 TO 14 JULY. TABLE FROM THE REPORT OF THE ARMY COMMAND

18 tank corps

It is necessary | Available Remaining | Irrevocable- | Evacuiro- on and available | on the battlefield | nye losses | Svyevi T-60 and T-70 BA-64

P. A. ROTHMISTROV TO G. K. ZHUKOV, AUGUST 20, 1943

First Deputy

People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR - Marshal of the Soviet Union comrade. Zhukov SOV.
SECRET

Ex. #1

TO THE FIRST DEPUTY PEOPLE'S COMMISSAR OF DEFENSE OF THE UNION OF THE USSR
- MARSHAL OF THE SOVIET UNION Comrade. Zhukov

In tank battles and battles from July 12 to August 20, 1943, the 5th Guards Tank Army met with exclusively new types of enemy tanks. Most of all, there were T-U ("Panther") tanks on the battlefield, a significant number of T-U1 ("Tiger") tanks, as well as modernized T-Shi T-SHU tanks.

Commanding tank units from the first days of the Patriotic War, I have to report to you that our tanks today have lost their superiority over enemy tanks in terms of armor and weapons.

The armament, armor and aiming of the fire of the German tanks became much higher, and only the exceptional courage of our tankers, the greater saturation of the tank units with artillery did not give the enemy the opportunity to use the advantages of their tanks to the end. The presence of powerful weapons, strong armor and good aiming devices in German tanks puts our tanks in a clearly disadvantageous position. The efficiency of using our tanks is greatly reduced and their breakdown is increasing.

The battles I conducted in the summer of 1943 convince me that even now we can successfully conduct a maneuverable tank battle on our own, using the excellent maneuverability of our T-34 tank.

When the Germans, with their tank units, go on the defensive, at least temporarily, they thereby deprive us of our maneuvering advantages and, on the contrary, begin to fully use the aiming range of their tanks.

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cannons, being at the same time almost completely out of reach from our aiming
tank fire.

Thus, in a collision with German tank units that have gone over to the defensive, we, as a general rule, suffer huge losses in tanks and have no success.

The Germans, having opposed our T-34 and KV tanks with their T-U ("Panther") and T-U1 ("Giger") tanks, no longer experience their former tank fear on the battlefields.

T-70 tanks simply could not be allowed to engage in tank combat, as they are more than easily destroyed by German tank fire.

We have to state with bitterness that our tank technology, with the exception of the introduction of self-propelled guns SU-122 and SU-152, did not give anything new during the war years, and the shortcomings that took place on tanks of the first production, somehow : imperfection of the transmission group (main clutch, gearbox and side clutches), extremely slow and uneven rotation of the tower, exceptionally poor visibility and cramped crew accommodation have not been completely eliminated even today.

If our aviation during the years of the Patriotic War, according to its tactical and technical data, has been steadily advancing, producing more and more advanced aircraft, then, unfortunately, this cannot be said about our tanks.

Now the T-34 and KV tanks have lost the first place that they rightfully had among the tanks of the warring countries in the first days of the war.

Back in December 1941, I captured the secret instruction of the German command, which was written on the basis of field tests conducted by the Germans of our KV-T-34 tanks.

As a result of these tests, the instruction was written approximately as follows: German tanks cannot engage in tank combat with Russian KV and T-34 tanks and must avoid tank combat. When meeting with Russian tanks, it was recommended to hide behind artillery and transfer the actions of tank units to another sector of the front.

And indeed, if we recall our tank battles

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1941 and 1942, it can be argued that the Germans usually did not enter into battle with us without the help of other branches of the armed forces, and if they did, then with a multiple superiority among their own

tanks, which was not difficult for them to achieve in 1941 and 1942. Based on our T-34 tank, the best tank in the world to

At the beginning of the war, the Germans in 1943 managed to produce an even more improved tank T-U ("Panther"), which, in fact, is a copy of our T-3 tank, is significantly superior in its qualities to the T-34 tank and especially in terms of weapon quality.

To characterize and compare our and German tanks, I give the following table:

The caliber for the guns is in mm dov poppy.

T-1 90—75 75*) EG

KV-1S | 75—69 76 T-M -8 | in | 5. 44.0 SU-152 70 || 0 43.0 "Ferdin-200 o 20.0 nand"

* The barrel of the 75 mm gun is 1.5 times longer than the barrel of our 76 mm gun, and the projectile has a much higher muzzle velocity.

(My note - T-1 - clearly means "Panther")

As an ardent patriot of the tank troops, I ask you, Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union, to break the conservatism and arrogance of our tank designers and manufacturers and raise the issue of mass production of new tanks by the winter of 1943, superior in their combat qualities and design design to the currently existing types of German tanks.

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In addition, I ask you to drastically improve the equipment of tank units with evacuation means.

The enemy, as a rule, evacuates all his wrecked tanks, and our tankers are often deprived of this opportunity, as a result of which we lose a lot in this period of tank recovery. At the same time, in those cases when the field of tank battles remains with the enemy for a certain period, our repairmen instead of their wrecked tanks find shapeless piles of metal, since this year the enemy, leaving the battlefield, blows up all our wrecked tanks.

Troop Commander

5th Guards Tank Army of the Guard Lieutenant General of the Tank Troops - (Rotmistrov) Signature.

August 20, 1943 - active army.

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SS troops - "ideological soldiers" or selected

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Boris Sokolov RED ARMY AGAINST SS TROOPS

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` Waffen-SS - Hitler's "guard", "ideologists - No.

- chesky soldiers "of National Socialism - according to — _ _ rightly considered the elite of the armed forces of Tre Thiego Reich, the most combat-ready troops of Nazi Germany. SS men were thrown into the most dangerous sectors of the front, used in decisive directions, in the most difficult situations. The crushing blow of the SS troops more than once decided the outcome of battles and entire campaigns. The names of the SS divisions - "Dead Head", "Reich", "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler", "Viking" and others - were known to every soldier on both sides of the front. Nazi propaganda cultivated the myth

about their invincibility.

In his new book, the well-known historian analyzes the main battles and operations of the Great Patriotic War, in which SS divisions and corps played a decisive role — the battles for Kharkov in February-March 1943, the Battle of Kursk, the liquidation of the Soviet bridgehead on the Mius River in July- August 1943, the Korsun-Shevchenko operation, the deblockade of the German 1st Panzer Army in April 1944, counterattacks in the area of Lake Balaton in January and March 1945.

Examining in detail the course of battles and the style of warfare, as well as the strategic opportunities that were not realized by both sides, the author shows how, despite the high combat capability of the elite SS units and the decisive importance that Hitler attached to operations with their participation, they were unable to reverse the unfavorable course of the war for Germany and were eventually defeated by the Red Army.

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